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The author prepared this report in collaboration with faculty members who in 1959-60 offered special courses designed to promote independent work by students at Amherst College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College, and the University of Massachusetts.

The 12 courses described were freshman seminars and student seminars associated with upperclass lecture courses. The primary purpose of the report was to present in some detail the experience of giving students more initiative rather than to formulate general conclusions.

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MORE POWER TO THEM

A Report of Faculty and Student Experience in the Encouragement of Student Initiative

By C. L. Barber

ED000864

This report was prepared for the presidents of Amherst College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College and the University of Massachusetts by the Committee for New College

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The project was directed by the Committee for New College: C. L. Barber, Amherst; Stuart M. Stoke, Mount Holyoke; Sidney Packard, Smith; Donald Sheehan, Smith; Shannon McCune, *Chairman,* University of Massachusetts.

MORE POWER TO THEM

A Report of Faculty and Student Experience in the Encouragement of Student Initiative

BY C. L. BARBER

This report was prepared in collaboration with other teachers who in 1959-60 offered special courses designed to promote independent work by students at Amherst College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College and the University of Massachusetts:

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A report submitted to the presidents of
Amherst College, Smith College, Mount Holyoke College
and the University of Massachusetts, by

THE COMMITTEE FOR NEW COLLEGE
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CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION: The Circumstances of the Project 5

II. The "Freshman Seminars" 9

1. Introductory Seminar in Political Science, by Professor Schuck at Mount Holyoke College. 9

Highlights: drastic limitation of the range of material, pp. 9-10, 14, 15-16; cutting students loose, pp. 10-12 and 12-14; distortion to be discounted in the students' evaluations, pp. 12-13; independence in assignments *vs* independence in discussion, pp. 15-16. (See also p. 56).

2. Introductory Seminar in Philosophy, by Professor Masi at Mount Holyoke College. 17

Difficulties in putting a single student in charge of a session, pp. 17-18; "to realize how little I know," p. 19.

3. Introductory Seminar in English Literature, by Professor Von Klemperer at Smith College. 19

Formulating assignments and assigning roles for discussion, pp. 19-21; limiting the range of subject matter, pp. 19, 21-22; freshman discussion meetings without the instructor, pp. 23-24; demands on faculty time, p. 24.

III. Student Seminars Associated with Upperclass Lecture Courses 26

1. Totalitarianism, by Professor Rothman at Smith College 27

Examples of topics for independent student discussion, p. 27; instructor's evaluation of independent discussion and its contribution to student papers, pp. 28-29 and pp. 30-31; student evaluations, pp. 29-30.

2. English Literature in the Seventeenth Century, by Professor DeMott at Amherst College. 31

Topics for independent discussion supplementing the regular course content, pp. 31-32; the value of student discussion of relatively unsophisticated questions, pp. 32-33 (and see pp. 57-59); student evaluations and suggestions for improvement, pp. 34-35.

3. Educational Psychology, by Dr. Miller at the University of Massachusetts 35

Difficulties in asking poorly motivated students to do independent work, pp. 35-36.

4. American History, by Mr. Van Halsey at the Summer School of the University of Massachusetts. 36

Difficulties with a heterogeneous student group, pp. 36-37.

5. Renaissance Poetry and Drama, Modern Poetry and James Joyce, by Professor Barber at Amherst College. 37

Reading aloud in discussion groups, pp. 37-38; the "reading group" as a distinct kind of student activity, pp. 38-39; the decisive importance of creating an academic context for the student discussion, pp. 39-40.

6. Renaissance Art, by Professor Norton at the University of Massachusetts 40

A small group of volunteers from a large course shows self-reliance and enthusiasm, pp. 41; heavy demands on museum and library facilities, pp. 41-42.

7. The Geography of Asia, by Professor Stobbe at Smith College 42

8. Civil Liberties, by Professor Beth at the University of Massachusetts. 43

Difficulties with extremely open assignments; constructive student suggestions for tighter organization, pp. 43-45; students recognize their failure to take over the initiative, p. 45.

9. Demography, by Professor Mair at Smith College 45

Introductory session a dialogue between representatives of different points of view, p. 46, each student made responsible for a specialty in the latter part of course, pp. 46-47; student evaluations of the discussion procedures, pp. 48-50; Professor Mair's general conclusions and suggestions about the method, pp. 50-51.

IV. The Amateurism of the American Undergraduate, the Course System, and the Problem of the Initiative 52

V. Summary and Conclusions 55

Appendix A: Excerpts from *The New College Plan*, Amherst, Mass., 1958.

Appendix B: A sample of bibliographies furnished students in connection with a topic for independent discussions in Professor Rothman's course on Totalitarianism.

Appendix C: Notes on discussion group procedure, and a summary of a discussion program, from Professor DeMott's course on Seventeenth Century Literature.

I. Introduction: The Circumstances of the Project

THE PRESENT widespread concern to encourage independent work by undergraduates reflects uneasiness about the effect of our standard system of courses and credits. This report will describe one among several current projects aimed at countering the tendency of our undergraduates to leave too much of the initiative in their education in the hands of their teachers. At Amherst College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College and the University of Massachusetts, in the academic year 1959-60, twelve faculty members tried out changes in their teaching procedures designed to promote student initiative and independence. The program was an outgrowth of the cooperative effort in planning a new style of college which in the previous year produced *The New College Plan*.[1] Both projects were sponsored by the four neighoring institutions concerned, and both were supported by grants from the Fund for the Advancement of Education of the Ford Foundation.

The primary purpose of the present report is to present in some detail experience of giving students more of the initiative, rather than to formulate general conclusions. A considerable number of experiments with independent study, variously conceived and executed, are being carried out across the country; their general scope and promise appears in recent studies and surveys.[2] Most of the reports available, however, concentrate on evaluation and tend to leave out detailed description of just what was done, of the complex interplay of teacher, students and subject. The project reported on here was much smaller and more loosely organized than several others that have been completed or are under way. But our hope is that, through a report which describes a number of the courses offered and procedures

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[1]Amherst, Mass., 1958. Another outgrowth of the planning project was a study aimed at improving the design of college buildings, *Student Responses to Study Facilities, With Implications for Architects and College Administrators*, conducted on the campuses of the cooperating institutions by Stuart M. Stoke and associates and published in 1960 for distribution through the Office of the Secretary of the College, Amherst College, Amherst, Mass. (copies available on request).

[2]Cf. *The Independent Study Program in the United States*, by J. Carber Drushal and Associates, New York, Columbia University Press, 1957. This study, "the Wooster report," is wide-ranging and critical. A number of experiments, together with some incisive reflections on them, are reported in *Better utilization of teaching resources . . . a summary report*, by the Committee on Utilization of College Teaching Resources, Donald H. Morrison (chairman), Elizabeth Paschal (Executive Secretary), New York, n.d. (1960), Fund for the Advancement of Education, 477 Madison Avenue (copies available on request). Effective summaries of programs and publication are *Independent Study* (New Dimensions in Higher Education, No. 1,) by Winslow R. Hatch and Ann Bennet, U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Education (publication OE-50005, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D.C.), and *Quest for Quality*, No. 7 in the same series, by Samuel Baskin.

used more or less play-by-play, we can contribute to what is most needed in the current development of independent study, namely, experience of the concrete possibilities and problems involved in putting students more on their own. In a recent survey of independent study programs, published by the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare under the title *Quest for Quality*, Dr. Samuel Baskin, Director of Educational Research at Antioch College, observes that

> There is still, of course, much to be done before we can really begin to evaluate the full impact of these independent study teaching procedures. For one thing, we do not know enough about how to teach by these newer methods, nor how we can best train students for working on their own. For another, we do not know enough, as the Oberlin and Michigan experimenters remind us, about student and instructor needs and personality patterns and what role these factors may play in the teaching-learning process.[3]

Systematic studies of these problems can be undertaken by the methods of the social sciences. Another approach, which we have adopted, is to exchange concrete experience. As Dr. Baskin remarks in the same publication, there can be no "*formula* for good teaching," by any method. But we can each learn from our own experience in trying to do things somewhat differently; and, within limits, we can learn from each other, if classroom doors are left ajar.

Another reason for centering on experiences rather than principles is that many college teachers have become allergic to talk about independent work, which in recent years has often been presented as a panacea. Good teachers are already, in all sorts of ways, engaged in promoting independent work by their students. All successful education involves independent work; and there is a sense in which all education must be dependent work. Working teachers are not impressed by programmatic, all-or-nothing distinctions. Responsible assessments of what is being done across the country, moreover, make it clear that while many hopeful new directions are being explored, Independence is no magic formula for escaping the difficulties of teaching and learning. The fact that there is a cult of independence in our culture is further ground for scepticism: "dependent" has become almost a dirty word, with psychiatric overtones of "infantile," while True Independence is the hero who rides off into the sunset.

It is clear that current discussions of independent work are phrasing problems that are old, indeed permanent. It is clear too that the course system in American colleges is not something that can be easily changed overnight. Our experience on the Committee for New College in planning possible large changes, and trying out actual small ones, has led us to encounter vividly the dynamics of the going arrangements. I will take occa-

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[3] *Op. cit.*, p. 8

sion in section III of this report to reflect on the manner in which the course serves, under American conditions, to organize the relation of the professional scholar to his amateur undergraduate students, so that the course system frames the problem of student initiative. But the fact that what exists has its logic and change has its limits does not mean that nothing can be done.

In developing *The New College Plan*, the planning Committee looked towards the results which can be hoped for from mutually reinforcing innovations in a whole educational organism. One of our key ideas was that students should be trained from the beginning to do independent work, instead of arriving at it only as a final climax. So we provided that instead of first encountering broad surveys of the results of scholarly disciplines, entering students should take "Freshman Seminars" in which they should be taught how a scholar works by exploring relatively limited subjects in some depth. Some experience of this kind in introductory courses is increasingly common in existing colleges where problem courses for freshmen are coming to replace or supplement surveys.[4] Our Freshman Seminars are envisaged as functioning also to develop the skills of collaboration in discussion groups, with increasing opportunities for the students to take the initiative as the year progresses. Then in upper-class courses, from sophomore year on, the plan provides for independent "Student Seminars." These are small discussion groups or study committees, composed of students taking a given lecture course and doing projects supervised by the lecturer, but working, for the most part, without his presence.

Various other features of the proposed curriculum are designed to work, with the Freshman Seminars and the combination of Student Seminars with lectures courses, to make student initiative and independent work the natural, expected thing at New College, part of its style of life. A three course program allows time for student projects and independent study. A need to work independently is to be promoted by subordinating the individual course as the unit and terminus of knowledge; the student is responsible for selecting and preparing for a constellation of "field examinations" in junior and senior years, examinations which are to require independent preparation in addition to the following of courses. These and other features of the plan are presented in Appendix A, a section of the original report which is reprinted here because the original booklet, *The New College Plan*, is out of print.

[4]The introduction of independent work at the outset of college has been advocated recently, e.g. by Dr. Samuel Baskin on the basis of his experience with a program of independent work at Antioch College (Hatch, *Independent Study*, p. 9), by Charles C. Cole, Jr. of Lafayette College in a report to the Carnegie Corporation (*ibid.*, p. 3 and p. 9), and by the college presidents who composed the Committee on Utilization of College Teaching Resource (*Better utilization of college teaching resources*, p. 21)

The Freshman Seminar, and the Student Seminar as an adjunct of upper-class courses, were the two features of the plan which could be introduced on an exploratory basis in the four neighboring colleges in the project to be described here. Since students were in each case taking only one "New-College-style" course, it was obviously not possible to test the effectiveness of the procedures as they might operate at the proposed institution. The Committee for New College felt some hesitation, for this reason, about undertaking a piece-meal program: one of our main points in urging the establishment of a new institution has been that a new *whole* could make possible changes in parts which are otherwise difficult or impossible. But we decided that while we could not test, we could explore.

In inviting colleagues to try out methods suggested by our paper model, we were eager to benefit from their skill, imagination and experienced sense of fact. So we urged them to develop the generalized descriptions in the plan[5] in whatever way each found most hopeful. It was not practicable to set up control groups (results from comparative tests in comparable programs have in any case usually proved inconclusive). The twelve faculty members participating, and the members of the Committee, met at the beginning and end of each semester to exchange ideas and experience. Each teacher worked out a syllabus and schedule specifying the teaching procedures he was trying out, then kept a log of the course's progress. Students wrote extensive anonymous evaluations, in some cases twice during the term; each faculty member wrote his or her own evaluation. Fourteen semester courses were offered: four in English, three in Government, two in Philosophy, and one each in Economics, Fine Arts, Geography, History, and Psychology. Three courses (five semesters) were "Freshman Seminars"; the rest tried out various versions of the "Student Seminar" in connection with upper-class electives.

It is suggested that queries about features of the various courses not covered by this report be addressed directly to the faculty member concerned, at his or her home institution.

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[5]See Appendix A, pp. and pp.

II. The "Freshman Seminars"

THREE COURSES were offered of the type which the New College Report labelled "Freshman Seminars." At Smith, Prof. Elizabeth Von Klemperer organized two groups of ten students each in a program which took the place of their Freshman English; at Mount Holyoke, Prof. Evelyn Masi introduced a group of fifteen freshmen to Philosophy in a special, experimental section of the introductory course; also at Mount Holyoke, Prof. Victoria Schuck gave an introduction to Political Science as a one-semester seminar which replaced a one-semester introductory lecture course, normally taken chiefly by sophomores. Because of scheduling difficulties, this last course could not be made available to freshmen, and so was taken by fourteen sophomores (with one stray freshman). Professor Schuck's design for the course, however, developed, in a most interesting and effective way, the sort of initiation into working as a scholar which the New College Plan envisages for freshmen. In all three cases, the student groups involved were representative in the range of their abilities and grades; students were not hand-picked for talent or initiative.

1. POLITICAL SCIENCE AT MOUNT HOLYOKE

We can best begin detailed reporting by quoting the account of the goals of Professor Schuck's Seminar given in the brief syllabus which her students received at the outset:

> This is a "New College" course—a "seminar" in American national government. It is designed to show the student how the scholar in political science works in his field—how he goes about raising questions, formulating hypotheses and defining fundamental issues, and then how he assembles materials and analyzes them in order to arrive at some answers. This is a discussion course; there are no examinations. Students will from time to time write papers and prepare reports.
>
> The subject of the seminar is the relationship between the President and the Congress. As we study this topic we shall take up such questions as what is politics . . . We shall seek to discover the locus of power in the federal government, how and for what purpose it is exercised, and what limitations are placed upon its exercise. We shall also want to consider the process of "decision-making." As we explore the subject we shall delve into theory, institutions, and procedures not only of the executive and the lawmaking body, but into the realm of the courts.
>
> To give a sharper focus to our subject, we shall concentrate on Eisenhower and the first session of the 86th Congress . . .

Professor Schuck's strategy was to open the study of political science by exploring the encounters between President Eisenhower and the heavily Democratic 86th Congress during its first session, which had ended just two weeks before her seminar began. To put her students in the position of finding for themselves the need for the resources of the discipline of political science, she organized the first weeks so that the student asked such recurring questions as "What is power?" while encountering a wide varie-

ty of writings—periodical and newspaper accounts of the "86th-1st"; ten or more of the *Federalist Papers;* Articles I and II of the Constitution; monographs on particular elements of government like White's *Citadel*; and Allen Drury's novel *Advise and Consent.* The first paper, due after three weekly two-hour seminar sessions which discussed "the questions a political scientist asks in approaching a subject," was an analysis of the view of the nature of power presented by the Drury novel. Definitions of terms were not presented by introductory lectures but were developed as the students used the words in early papers—after they "began to flap around with terminology," as Professor Schuck puts it. A particularly extensive discussion "grew out of the terms misused and the clichés flung about in the essays" on Drury's novel.

The second phase of the course included a series of short papers on elections and on procedures of government, with exercises in note-taking and in "simple methods of handling data (profile information, election statistics, voting records)." The students were prepared in this way for a long paper due early in December on bases of power, a project which grew out of an extended analysis of the fight over modification of rule 22 (cloture rule). The final phase of the program was centered on each student's preparation of a long paper about a different key issue of the session: "Farm Surplus Legislation," "Hawaiian Statehood," "Labor Management Bills," "The Strauss Nomination," etc. Drafts of these essays were read by the instructor and then rewritten by the students. Regular meetings were suspended for a time; then there was a final meeting:

> Each student had five minutes to present the conclusions of her paper. The class then constructed from the findings on the 15 measures a composite verification of hypotheses. These conclusions on Eisenhower's relations with the 1959 session of Congress and the power each had ran counter to the analysis and conclusions [read earlier in the course] in the press and magazines. Again the students were "a band of scholars" completely absorbed in the subject. The excitement of discovery after days of work and analysis came, I think, to each member of the group.

The remarkable success of this seminar, to which as we shall see all participants testified enthusiastically, was purchased by the instructor's daring to cut the students loose, to let them get lost, and by the students' pluck in persisting until, with Professor Schuck's help, they found themselves. The assignments, after the first three weeks, were never specific numbers of pages in particular books. The students were given at the outset lists of classic works, monographs on the presidency and the Congress, professional and general periodicals, documents and other sources— a list which at first seemed to them staggeringly long and in the end came to seem limited. "Assignments "were made in terms of the subjects to be covered or the hypotheses to be proved. Categories of material were referred to as the probable 'best sources' to use." Professor Schuck reports

that "this do-it-yourself . . . at first caused a goodly amount of floundering about," and she indicates that another time she would offer more aid at the outset. She reports also that this kind of learning "does take time—students need it to rummage around in books and materials, to make mistakes in selecting books and materials, to find the better materials."

But the investment of time and nerves was clearly worth it, for the students all testify to having gained a new kind of interest in the work and confidence in their own powers. The students met after the course was over and produced a collective evaluation which reads in part:

> The students in Political Science 131 unanimously agreed that the New College seminar was much more valuable to the under-class student than the usual basic courses offered at Mount Holyoke. Although more specific information is given in the present basic courses, the limited-subject approach of the New College course provided a more useful foundation for study than the "survey" attempts of the basic courses. Much of the factual information learned in regular courses in soon forgotten, but the insight into basic problems and study techniques provided by the New College course affords a springboard for further study.
>
> The usual background material of basic course textbooks was not missed by the students, for as they worked on specific problems in their research each felt that the background material was covered as well. The students were stimulated to extend their knowledge and absorb background material independently through the study methods developed in the course. In basic courses the student's information is limited to class lectures, set reading assignments, and restricted research for papers. In the New College course there was no limit to the information available to the student since she was mastering the methods necessary to obtain any information she wished. All the students felt this was the primary achievement of the course. The development of the methodology of research and writing provides a lasting basis for further study. The opportunity for independent work offered by the New College course is sorely missed in basic courses, and provided additional incentive to the students. All agreed that their work was very satisfying and that they had been able to produce work of a quality and quantity that they had not realized they were capable of producing.
>
> As has been pointed out, the New College course provided the students with a sound basis in the methodology of study and research which all students agreed would be of lasting value not only in the field of political science, but also in their daily work in other fields. By "spoon-feeding" factual material in specific reading assignments and set lectures, basic courses do not allow the student the experience of hunting down and dealing directly with primary sources. It was the view of the class that each student had gained a sound familiarity with the major source materials for the study of American national government, and could approach further study with confidence. Several students particularly enjoyed the opportunity of choosing that portion of the material which was most valuable to them as students, thereby using the tools of scholarshp and political analysis developed through the course. The class was able to acquire general knowledge of American national government through the study of the specific problem of Executive-Legislative relationship, not depeendent on a text-book interpretation but on ther own research as guided by the instructor. All the students were conscious of the value of deciding the questions to be asked in the study of political science and then attempting to at least partially solve them by using the tools of political study.
>
> The class agreed completely that, on the basis of their experience with the program, the New College itself would be most successful.

Student evaluations obviously have to be read with reservations. Taking part in an "experiment" brings excitement, added effort, better results. Both Professor Schuck and Professor Mair, in assessing their students' favorable responses, recalled the classic instance of favorable distortion in the experiments at the Hawthorne plant of Western Electric. One student report on Professor Schuck's course describes this stimulus with amusing candor: "Moreover, there remains something of value in knowing a higher responsibility than one's immediate contemporaries. The separation from the run-of-the-mill student brings with it a sort of pride, and enthusiasm for self-expression and for excellence." Besides this "Hawthorne effect," there is the tendency of students, in writing evaluations, to take over whatever framework they are given—as here the opposition between survey courses and the seminar, "information . . . limited" as against "no limit to the information available." Students, especially women students, are generous, as well as inexperienced; their training in cooperating with their teachers predisposes them towards favorable evaluation in any particular instance. Such enthusiasm can draw fuel from a general attitude of disenchantment or truculence. "As a staunch critic of most of the courses taught at Mount Holyoke, I entered this course with great enthusiasm . . ." All of us who took part in the trial course program were conscious that part of the student enthusiasm we encountered resulted from such factors; we were agreed in discounting both partisanship for the "experimental" and the tendency in praising novel procedures to run down "ordinary" courses or "other" courses. Categorical evaluations must not be assessed as conclusions, but as evidence.

The evidence in several of the individual reports by Professor Schuck's students permits us to see how their sense of real achievement came after real distress: the cutting loose process was not easy, especially, one gathers, for the more conscientious students. One concludes her evaluation with "I found the course an excellent experience, forgetting in retrospect moments of complete despair." Another spells out the disquiet which preceded "the discovery that I could teach myself":

> at the beginning of the course I was afraid and lacked confidence, for I did not know how much necessary background material I could absorb without the discipline of definite weekly page assignments. I had the frustrating feeling of wanting to read every text, every monograph, and to somehow learn enough to be able to discuss problems intelligently . . . Although I did not realize it at the time, I can see now that this gave me the confidence in my ability to supply my own background.

In another report, the uncertainty is described as continuing for a long time:

> in the seminar sessions I didn't feel I was able to collect and arrange mentally the material I had studied. Since we were reading so widely from week to week in a variety of subjects it was naturally impossible to discuss all of it. I seemed to have a great deal of specific information in a broad framework, but with little to tie it together . . . When I began the

> final paper, these fears vanished. I then realized that I had been acquiring skill as well as knowledge and that by combining the two, I could produce a paper which was an immensely satisfying one to write.

One account is particularly charming because it describes the perplexity which comes from discovering how interesting everything can be:

> The experience of being thrown into an unfamiliar subject was quite bewildering at the outset. The terminology had to be gradually acquired: now it has become a permanent segment of my vocabulary. With no assigned readings or bibliography, it was the student's responsibility which determined the scope and depth of her reading. This forced me to be selective in both quality and quantity of sources to be read. At first, I made many mistakes and went on undisciplined sprees of reading and writing, using the criteria of interest, rather than applicability, in evaluating sources. This, as I painfully learned, must be avoided in the study of political science. I know that the acquisition of evaluation and objective analysis of reading material will remain with me in all my courses and daily reading. I cannot praise too highly this product of the course.

The *disorganization* which these girls experienced is something which we shall encounter repeatedly in surveying the various efforts made to contrive independence for students. That independent study is often disorganized—or unorganized—is a fact that is easily overlooked in positive, summary statements, like "Knowledge is not presented to you, you discover." "It was not studying, it was learning . . ." ". . . the methods I have acquired are now mine to be used, not forgotten. They are not meaningless theories of procedure or method but actual means I have discovered are best suited to help one answer questions." That learning moves *through* disorganization is a heartening fact—*after* the fact. The tensions *in medias res* put a strong pressure on the instructor to respond to the students' plea when, implicitly or explicitly, they beg to be organized prematurely, to be kept organized all the time. The sort of uncertainties that go with resolutely cutting students loose are brought out by a student who praised the course in general because she "was involved in a subject rather than just studying it from the outside." In particular, she reported, "One can see here what a pull there is on the instructor to short circuit by too-complete directions the independent process of the student's learning. Independence seems easy and inevitable only so long as it is put generally: "I can say, then, that this course, in encouraging me to think for myself, to find my own material and to draw my own conclusions, developed my mind, not just my memory."

> I was only able to figure out where each assignment had been leading the class after I began to write the first major paper, on power in the federal government. Whether this is good or not, I cannot say. Perhaps not knowing exactly where we were headed helped us to consider each paper as an end in itself; if we had seen our goal, i.e. the first large paper, we might have been inclined to read and to learn only that information we thought might need to be included in our final work. This way, we drew from our experience to write our first paper instead of learning solely to write it.

Professor Schuck's students, in going through uncertainty and coming

out on the other side, developed a quite special confidence and commitment. Their regrets that they got started so slowly are significantly matched by regrets that they had to stop so soon:

> The only ultimate regret I have concerning the course is connected with its hectic conclusion. There had been many discussions which the entire group would have enjoyed prolonging and many topics, for instance the role of political party membership in congressional elections, which we were forced to abandon due to lack of time. I felt the most acute regret at not being able to discuss at greater length our final conclusions on the bills we had studied. We had all done exhaustive research and analysis and were burning with the desire to exchange our discoveries about the presidential-congressional interaction. I would have hoped that we could have spent at least three or four hours in an intensive exchange about our papers to conclude the course.

"On the bright lexicon of youth . . . !" This young mind is coming up against the sad fact older scholars have learned to live with: that while the knowledge is unlimited, there are limits to time and to people. It was the consensus of the group that they would have preferred not to omit any of the seminar meetings during the period when they were writing their papers. Professor Schuck contrasts the relative lack of student participation in early meetings with the concluding class meetings, "characterized by 'close' discussions of a sophisticated character. In the end, the frustrations and grumblings were of an entirely different character—how to obtain more class hours to talk about the findings, to make comparisons of data, and to reach a general conclusion on the subject of the course. The final class was a high point. I think each student experienced the excitement of a scholar presenting proof of her hypotheses." It is notable that the commitment arrived at through lonely puzzlement is a group affair—one girl speaks of "the stimulus of group adventure." The limited subject is also a factor—the group are looking for common answers because they have a problem in common. Professor Schuck notes that the particular character of the "limited subject" is crucial—if it is "intellectually stimulating," then "any amount of tedium can be draped about it. (To illustrate, students spent a lot of time reducing data to percentages for proof of one hypothesis, and this could have been a bore had the results not been 'fascinating.')"

In line with the New College proposal that training in composition, except for remedial work, should be the responsibility of the teachers of the freshman's humanities and social science seminars, not of a separate freshman composition course, Professor Schuck concerned herself with the English of her students. Her sophomores had in fact already taken a Freshman English course—no "test" was involved. But of course (as is always the case!) they were still able to use help: "it was surprising to everyone that a paper in political science should be returned with such marks as 'syntax'." In addition to five papers, students handed in one "set" of notes: "almost no student understood the purposes of a procedure for notetaking or had a system

to fit her needs." To help them with their writing, students were referred to the chapter on "Politics and the English language" in George Orwell's *Shooting an Elephant,* as well as to Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style.*

It scarcely need be said, after the foregoing, that the seminar took a great deal of Professor Schuck's time—more time per student, clearly, than most introductory courses given in the usual ways. It is perfectly clear that the course represents a "use of teaching resources" which could not be extended across the board under present curricular arrangements.

"Independence" can take many forms: thus Professor Schuck and her students felt that in the first phases of the course there was much too little student initiative in the discussion during seminar meetings. The report prepared by the group as a whole expressed regret that so much time had been devoted to methodology:

> The class's primary criticism of the course concerned the seminar meetings themselves. There was a general feeling of disappointment in the nature of the discussion. The time should have been used for discussion to synthesize the knowledge gained . . . discussion of the problems of American government. Several students felt that the exercises in learning techniques were not necessary, but the consensus was that the methodology which was taught was very important to the course's success, but should have been more precisely defined at the beginning.

It is interesting to find the class, in their group report, proposing that students be given the initiative to lead discussion, on an organized basis:

> After discussing the problems of seminar preparation, the class decided that student discussion leaders would be very helpful. As the rest of the class did weekly independent research on a broad topic, one student would do intensive study of one major aspect or problem of this topic. She would then, in close cooperation with the professor, lead the discussion the following week, approaching the broad topic through her study of the single major problem. This would serve to bring a focal point before the class and, hopefully, bring participation from all students.

We shall see that such assignments of roles in discussion were made in many of the other trial courses. But usually seminar discussion when the students were given the initiative went with rigorous, *specific* assignments of readings—which is just where Professor Schuck put her students on their own. It appears that the drastic (and ultimately very fruitful) independence which she gave in not assigning readings may make it necessary that, in the first phases of the course, there should be relatively little student independence in class discussion—independence in class and in research outside may be dependent variables—the instructor needs to give form and discipline in class if outside of class the students have an open field. Several individual reports said things like

> This lack of discussion was our own fault but understandable because everyone was a bit shy, a bit unsure of where she was being led, and thus a bit hesitant to put herself on the spot.

In the latter part of the course, this diffidence seems to have been forgotten in eager exchanges growing out of the independent study.

In considering their experience in relation to that of students in the "usual" introduction to American government, the students in Professor Schuck's special section of the course felt confident that "the class was able to acquire general knowledge of American national government through the study of the specific problem of executive-legislative relationship," and that what they missed in coverage they had gained in skills:

> I have learned to be resourceful and self-reliant in the field of political science. I don't know about many aspects of American national government, but now I have the tools—the tools of the political scientist—which will enable me to learn about any aspect in which I am interested.

Of course the student was in no position to judge, really, either what she had missed, or the ultimate educational consequences of her missing it. The issues raised involve not only the effect of one course but the design of the whole curriculum and, beyond that, what it is we want from the whole curriculum. But what the testimony of Professor Schuck's students does settle is that they found something of value and power: "To know that one is a semi-expert in one subject is a very exciting and rewarding experience." "Whether one plans to continue with the subject or not, this type of course offers a sound basis for further study . . . I can now 'get around' in the subject . . ."

It is also clear that the students felt that the seminar stood out from the staple of their experience. Confronting the question of whether the seminar could have been given to freshmen, "over two-thirds of the students felt that the program of freshman seminar courses [planned for New College] would be the most stimulating introduction to college possible, and many regretted not having had the benefits of the course their freshman year. One student suggested that the seminars be deferred until the second semester of freshman year, but after discussion the class as a whole agreed that although the courses required a great amount of time and adjustment in a five-course plan, in a three-course system it could be an invaluable experience to an incoming student who expected and understood the program." The making of contrasts led to several very simplified, unfair summaries of "other" courses, "where all I had to do was parrot back facts." One has to discount some of the emphasis with which the seminar was welcomed, since it is fashionable to descry "survey" courses and to complain that freshman and sophomore year courses are too much like courses in high school. One also notes a tendency to want to eat the cake of independence but have "more guidance" too. But on balance the sense of discovering new possibilities is what stands out. Professor Schuck observes:

> To return to the teaching of the traditional type of beginning course will be drab and dull. This 'let down' feeling about going back to the typical

lecture and discussion classes was general among the students also. They expressed it immediately upon the conclusion of the seminar when they dropped into the office to talk about their future programs and again they mentioned it about mid-March when we met together for tea.

2. PHILOSOPHY AT MOUNT HOLYOKE

Professor Evelyn Masi, in her seminar in Philosophy for fifteen Mount Holyoke freshmen, limited the subject-matter covered by exploring a single theme, the nature of good and evil, in four ancient authors during the fall and in readings from modern thinkers during the spring term. In the first semester, she encountered difficulties in getting the students to take the initiative in discussion, partly because they on their side had dfficulty in recognizing, in the assigned readings, the philosophical problems with which the course was concerned. A symptom of this difficulty was student comment that the reading assigned was "too short"—what happened, in Professor Masi's judgment, was that they tended to fail to formulate or develop questions as they read through such works as the *Oresteia,* or the *Crito* and *Phaedo*. In this situation, the instructor was forced to take the lead most of the time during the two-hour seminar sessions. Professor Masi concluded that if she were to give the course again, she would "give occasional lectures to fill in background on philosophy." The student reaction to the four papers assigned during the first semester, as against the seminar discussion, was strongly favorable; the assignment for each paper served to confront the students with formulated issues about the ethical implications of what they read, and they took hold with enthusiasm.

In the second semester, Professor Masi introduced changes in procedure which were designed to promote "participation by the students themselves in the course." "Instead of the instructor leading the seminar, each student took over" one meeting, "preparing a report on the week's reading, and leading discussion on the material." Professor Masi consulted with each student before the seminar "to guide in choosing and exploring the problems relevant to the material for the week." In addition to conducting a seminar, each wrote a 2500 word research paper, and "an original 'Philosophy of Life' paper, of the type required in the regular basic course—in lieu of the series of short papers on problems assigned by the instructor in the first semester." The students, with one or two exceptions, found the opportunity to conduct the class rewarding: "In giving an oral report one is forced to know the subject far more than in simply writing the paper." ". . . embarrassing, but very worthwhile . . . makes one work hard when his thoughts are displayed before the class." But the difficulty with putting a single student in the position of performer and leader for a whole session was that the rest of the group were too little involved, by preparation or role. Professor Masi's judgment was that

> Three of the oral reports were quite good, a few bad, and the majority were mediocre. Even the better students were tripped up on quite elementary points, a fact quite surprising to me as an instructor. Many did not develop or carry through ideas sufficiently. I agree with this comment by a student: "The oral reports often seemed to be only a summary of what we read and already knew. I think there should have been deeper analyses and criticism, and this would have stimulated interest and participation on the part of the listener."

Even in graduate school, when a system of individual reports is used in a seminar, the listening is often tedious and unrewarding; it is clear from Professor Masi's experience that what often fails with graduate students worked only fitfully with freshmen. Her conclusion was that, in another trial, she would make several modifications directed towards giving a more clear-cut structure to the program of study and the students' roles in discussion: in addition to occasional lectures, this shift in emphasis would "set questions for discussion, include more papers on specific problems," and "restrict the group to not more than ten."

In spite of these difficulties in adapting the seminar situation to freshmen, there was a good deal of enthusiasm in some of the student evaluations for the opportunities offered by discussion. It was described by one student as "the most worthwhile experience I have found in college." Another wrote: "This was invaluable. From class discussions I was able to formulate my own ideas on various philosophers rather than just having them poured into my mind by lectures. From talking to students in other classes, I think this also makes a more indelible impression on the mind. I remembered things discussed at the beginning of the year." There were comparable negative comments. This corresponds with Professor Masi's comment that the class was carried by the "superior students, and those who are high-spirited, . . . while the run of the mill ones tend to be more or less dead weight." The fact that there were "no examinations to bring one to heel" contributed, in Professor Masi's judgment, to the slack response of those who were not sufficiently engaged by other means.

Comparison of the "Philosophy of Life" papers of students in the seminar with papers of girls in regular sections of the introductory course "did not reveal any very significant differences. I think it can be said that the student in the experimental section did not appear handicapped in handling metaphysical and epistemological questions, even though we concentrated on the ethical. I believe that students in the experimental section learned something a little different (less terminology, specificisms, technical questions), but they gained a wholistic view of philosophy that seemed to stand them in good stead when they came to formulate their own ideas." Student evaluations supported this judgment, some regretting the limited encounter with terminology, others not, but almost all indicating, in one way or another, satisfaction about "seeing some of the problems the phi-

losophers had to face" and feeling "as if one is participating in philosophy and not just hearing about it."

These positive results, in the face of the consensus that the discussions only occasionally were fully exciting and tended to be formless, go with the fact that, as one student put it, "I began to realize how little I know and how poorly trained I am to really think out something." Professor Masi observed that "this type of course, in contrast to the standard ones, reveals the measure of the student's mind, what needs to be done to develop it, and whether or not a student is or is not making progress in the subject." We shall encounter this point again in the reports of student seminars tried in connection with upper-class courses. As Professor Masi herself concludes, the value for the students of discovering where they actually are need not exclude giving them a clearer, firmer set of coordinates than they can find in catch-as-catch-can discussion. One must add, too, that the seminar method, in whatever form, is not of course the only method for bringing students to realize their actual relation to a subject, as a step towards improving it: such realizations are a part of "standard" courses too. Our various trials did bring out, however, as will appear repeatedly, that giving students the initiative is a most effective way to bringing them to a fruitful recognition of their ignorance. Professor Masi's report concludes:

> That the students appreciated those features of the course which required them to exercise their own minds to learn for themselves—i.e. the papers and the oral reports—is most heartening and heart-warming.

3. ENGLISH LITERATURE AT SMITH

In Prof. Elizabeth Von Klemperer's freshman seminars on English literature at Smith, we encounter the sort of organization of discussion by assigning topics and roles which some of Professor Schuck's students recommended in their evaluations. Professor Von Klemperer's results indicate what appears also in a number of the other experiments: that, once given the initiative, the students tend to make good use of it in proportion to the clarity of the outlines of the situation they are given to work in—the intellectual or academic situation established for them by the instructor.

Working with two groups of ten freshmen through two semesters, Professor Von Klemperer decided to limit the subject-matter of her introduction to literature by exploring works from only two periods, reading writings from a twenty-five year span of the English renaissance during the fall, and from a group of mutually-illuminating authors of the early twentieth century in the spring. There were weekly two-hour meetings in which individuals were assigned particular topics:

> besides doing the required reading, each student would have given some thought, and in most cases done some outside reading, on one of four or five problems suggested in advance. She would then be prepared to present it in

> three or four minutes and/or to engage the rest of the class in discussion. To give an example: two students (supplementing, or as the case might be, disagreeing with each other) would be in charge of defining the term "essay" and of sketching its origins; one would analyze the structure of one of Bacon's *Essays*; one would discuss the style of this essay in terms of syntax and rhythm, and another in terms of diction and imagery; one would discuss the tone, the reader-writer relationship, of two or three essays; and finally the remaining students would try to define the personality or character that emerges from these essays—was Bacon a man of feeling? Was he ethical?

Professor Von Klemperer supplemented the seminar meetings by an optional one-hour class, open to both groups, "to discuss such practical or technical matters as the organization of a critical paper, paraphrase and quotation in the use of secondary source material, the difference between meter and rhythm, simile and metaphor, and so forth." Thus resources for dealing with the seminar problems were made available as something the students should come and get, rather than something forced upon them—and these resource sessions were well attended. "Their optional nature has given students a feeling of both freedom and responsibility." Freshmen extremely well prepared in English came to the sessions, as well as those with weak school backgrounds. Five papers were assigned each semester: in the beginning the problems to be dealt with were closely phrased: to define each of Bacon's Four Idols in the student's own terms and to illustrate each definition with an example drawn from modern life or thought; to analyze a short lyric with particular attention to sound pattern and tonal structure; another lyric, with particular attention to imagery. As the course progressed, topics were larger and more discretionary, with a final, project paper "on some aspect of a given author in the light of" several of his works, with reference, if the student chose, to secondary works. "Throughout the year, two or three of the best or most interesting papers were put in a place where all the students in the experiment could see them." Professor Von Klemperer felt that more papers might have been assigned, but limited the number to conform to the regular practice in the freshman English course.

She reports that "the two hour meetings of small groups were unexpectedly successful. Early in the autumn most of the students were restless by the end of the first hour. At mid-years they voted unanimously against converting the meetings into one hour sessions. By spring, they no longer wanted to interrupt the discussion with a brief break. The small size of these groups made anonymity impossible, for a student who remained silent would become conspicuous. Moreover, with about two exceptions, every student felt some responsibility for the success of the proceedings." The method of assigning reports involved hazards, as some students noted in their evaluations: "The chief merit is that we may present and compare with others our ideas. The only disadvantage is that reports are often not well-prepared." "Perhaps, at times, more succinctness and clarity could be ex-

pected of a student . . . —and at times the reports themselves might be more detailed and lengthy." There are suggestions that at times the giving of reports became cramping: "I would like sometimes . . . a completely open debate in class . . . people were a little hesitant to break into somebody's report with a dissenting opinion." The key factor, however, was clearly the degree of preparation: "I much prefer the . . . method of having to do a short but precise presentation every week, *provided* that students do an adequate job of preparing their subject beforehand." Yet comments on such limitations went with endorsements by almost every student for the discussion method. Comments written after the first semester included:

> I feel that putting more responsibility on the students makes a more alert and interesting class. The informal manner of the class gives everyone a chance to give her opinion and to ask questions which she, as well as others, would like answered.
>
> The number and kind of topics have proved good and interesting.
>
> I think we should continue to have assigned short subjects, because these can be a basis for discussion and the student giving the report can lead the others into free discussion.
>
> I enjoy the reports and would not mind longer and more formal ones occasionally—perhaps once each month.
>
> The responsibility of having to prepare a topic every week stimulates interest in class and insures against a "slacking off" in work which could occur if one only had to do a few reports during the term.
>
> Formal reports, if too long, can lose their value. However, the reports that were given in class seemed to be mixed with enough free discussion to keep everyone interested. This was especially true at the end of the semester, during the last few discussions.

There was an equally strong endorsement of the limited subject matter. Some students remarked that to work only on authors from one short period all term "could be limiting to someone without a broad background." But no one felt that this objection applied in her case. And there were many comments to the effect that "it is a relief to concentrate in one field as a freshman, since so many of my courses are chronological survey courses."

> . . . for the first time, I feel I know something about at least one period of literature.
>
> I think this course is very helpful in that it concentrates on one short period of time and thus lets one get his bearings in at least one course.
>
> After this course, one begins to take a closer look at other short periods, having seen how much was in this one. It makes any survey course more valuable, because you realize how much more there is to the subject than just hundred year periods and sweeping generalizations . . . It certainly is the most interesting and rewarding course I have this year.

Some oversimplifying, either-or thinking is apparent in these comments; but the evaluations recognize that limitation of subject could be carried too far and that survey courses have their function, too. Asked whether *both* semesters should perhaps be on one period, the response was No: one girl remarked that "it would begin to cramp the over-enthusiastic freshman mind that wants to see all, know all."

In electing to devote the first term to works from a period in the Renaissance, Professor Von Klemperer started from the conviction that

> Ideally, a freshman English course should teach students not only to find their way around in literary works of their own era but also to find their way into works of a relatively remote period. They should learn—or rather, begin to learn—to recognize and surmount the difficulties posed by literature that confronts them with an unfamiliar idiom and somewhat unfamiliar moral assumptions and emotional habits. . . .
>
> By considering, say, a lyric by Donne both as a timeless artifact and as an early 17th century poem, students should learn to distinguish—at least roughly—between "pure" criticism and literary history, and to see the virtue of each.
>
> There is good reason for devoting a whole semester to works of a single, limited period. For one thing, most freshmen lack the experience and the agility to sample several periods with any depth. More important, by dwelling for some time on a single period freshmen learn to consider it in two complementary ways; they learn on the one hand to see connections and affinities, to read one author by the light of another; but they learn on the other hand to see the diversity, even the contradictions, within a given period.
>
> I chose these two particular periods for several reasons. Together they contain several of the major genres. Both are rich in major, or at least significant, works—works which a freshman will or should be glad to have read whatever her eventual major. Furthermore, these works make possible a certain continuity, certain thematic links between the two semesters: for instance, both Shakespeare and Hemingway present the tragic outcome of love in war. Finally, the affinities between the Jacobean and the modern periods have been so often mentioned as to invite scrutiny by students and instructors alike. The last session of the year was spent comparing certain features of the two periods, noting the reaction against "poetic" loveliness in Donne and Eliot, foreseeing in Bacon's science "for the benefit and use of men" the taxicabs and gramophones of the *Waste Land*.
>
> Certain literary problems were considered twice over and from two quite different vantage points during the course of the year, since the year's work was not arranged topically. With freshmen especially there is some virtue in approaching, setting aside, and reapproaching both vast problems, such as the nature of tragedy, and rather difficult technical ones, such as the relation of sentence structure to thought and sensibility (something that we examined both in Bacon and in Hemingway) . . . .
>
> The focus on two limited periods was, as far as I have been able to see, an unqualified success. The students welcome this respite from the relentless trudge down through the centuries in their survey courses. And they had the impression (I say this because the experiment was naturally superficial compared to upperclass seminars) that they were going into depth. "I liked the serious feeling of it," said one. Said another, "This is the only course I'm taking that really feels like a college course."
>
> The choice of periods proved good, notwithstanding the look of alarm that appeared on several faces when I first uttered the word "Jacobean." When asked, at the end of the year, which of the two periods they had found more interesting, almost half of the students answered that they had, if anything, preferred studying the earlier one. A number of students wished that there had been even more "background material," more literary history during the second semester (this surprised me, for I thought I had given them as much as they needed along these lines—see below). They would have liked a more extensive list of suggested reading, one including works by Freud, Bergson, and so forth. They would have liked two or three lectures on the late Victorians and Georgians—"We want to know whom Eliot was reacting against!"—"Just what was this novel that Virginia Woolf was dissatisfied with?" All in all, I was struck by their hunger for literary history, though I do not think that they should expect a freshman English course to satisfy it.

Since Professor Von Klemperer was taking her two seminar groups through the whole year, it was possible for her to try out the suggestion in *The New College Plan* that in the second semester freshmen be introduced gradually to the combination of lectures with student seminars which is envisaged as the norm for upper-class courses at New College. When she asked her students at the end of the first semester about trying discussion alone, without instructor, some were disquited: "I don't think any student is qualified to lead a discussion. It must be led by someone who has enough background in the subject for there is nothing more disconcerting than a discussion led by someone who has to keep referring questions to someone else." One girl who at midyears shared the general hesitancy went on with her comment in an amusingly inconsistent direction: "I personally would never want to lead a class; however, there might be some students who would. In a sense it might be a good idea; it is good mental exercise to teach. You'd be amazed at how much more you learn about the subject when you try to teach it." In the second term:

> Every other week the hour-long meetings were, as before, optional and devoted mainly to practical and technical problems. On alternate weeks these meetings took the form of lectures at which attendance was required by both groups. The nature of these lectures varied: I tried in some to present a general theme or principle in terms of one or two short works (for instance, the use of myth and primordial images as exemplified by two of Lawrence's stories); in others I presented supplementary information about a particular author (for instance, the significance of some of Yeats's major symbols).
>
> From time to time four one-hour meetings for groups of five students replaced the two-hour meetings for groups of ten.
>
> From time to time the first half of a two-hour meeting was conducted in my absence by the students themselves, one student serving as chairman and another as secretary.

The efficacy of such arrangements about class procedure depends, inevitably, on what has happened and is happening in the course *intellectually*. The discussion or seminar method, which Professor Von Klemperer's students found so satisfying, worked because the students were brought into the discipline of literary studies in a cogent fashion. Thus the practice of assigning topics, useful in several ways, served to introduce students to the vocabulary of the discipline by inviting them to use parts of it. And as the year progressed, returning at intervals to new versions of issues already encountered, the students knew more clearly where they were in terms of the discipline and so were able to move more on their own. Professor Von Klemperer stressed that her freshmen were freshmen:

> In a seminar situation freshmen need constant, though unobtrusive guidance. In a seminar made up of able seniors majoring in a given field, the instructor may simply play the part of catalyst. But most freshmen are still inarticulate: in presenting a problem or defending a position, many of them lack clarity, or fail to single out essentials from details, or simply tend to be boring unless gently urged along. Furthermore, most freshmen really do not know very much, and when they give information to the class they tend to garble it unless the instructor interferes tactfully. Finally, it takes students some time to

> learn not what they should know but what they could or should *ask* about a given work or subject.

Professor Von Klemperer herself was not sure in advance that sessions without her presence in the second semester would prove feasible. But at the end she reported that her students

> discovered that student-run discussions, about which they had been quite dubious, could be stimulating and profitable *given appropriate subject-matter.* I myself have concluded that some student-run discussions are a good thing for freshmen, provided they are well prepared . . . [They] were more successful in connection with some subjects than others. Conrad's *Secret Sharer* made for a lively and fruitful argument. Some of Eliot's poems beguiled the group into by-ways of irrelevance and error. At any rate, these student-led discussions made their participants work things out for themselves without prodding on the instructor's part. I might add that these meetings do not save the instructor time, for they require very careful preliminary planning.

It is quite clear, from Professor Schuck and Professor Masi's experience as well as from Professor Von Klemperer's, that more time is required for the conduct of Freshman Seminars than for handling the usual freshman section. It is reasonable to assume that the second time through such a course would be less time-consuming; but not enough so to balance out. The number of students in each seminar cannot be large—both Professor Schuck and Professor Masi found fifteen too many; in *The New College Plan* we specified twelve or thirteen. This means a very large investment of faculty time in teaching freshmen. But in our judgment, the investment would be worth it, for the sake of the dividends in initiative and scholarly independence which would pay off later, particularly if the student experienced two Freshman Seminars, not just one. As envisaged in *The New College Plan,* the necessary faculty time would be made possible by reducing the number of courses taken by a student at one time to three, and by cutting down drastically the number of courses in the total course offering for upperclassmen. Other adaptations are possible: some colleges already teach some freshman subjects in sections small enough to be convertible to seminar-like methods. And it should be said, with emphasis, that some freshman courses of this type are and long have been, in effect, seminars; we were well aware that what we were labeling "seminar" in the New College freshman program would not be unprecedented—indeed we were rather uneasy about using the name, though it has now been given currency by the Harvard-Radcliffe introduction of a variety of "Freshman Seminars" for especially talented or qualified students.

We can conclude our account of Professor Von Klemperer's excellent course by referring to her experience with the effect of the simple, fundamental matter of class size:

> I should say, rather diffidently (having just conferred with a student who still cannot organize a paragraph) that the student's writing showed somewhat more improvement than it has in my conventional English II courses. Because they met with me in small groups, students felt that I was really concerned with their individual interests and development. Therefore

> they handed in almost no perfunctory written work. I was especially pleased by the performance of certain quite well-prepared, self-assured students of the kind who sometimes decide that English II is a course in which one can safely relax: these girls made a sustained effort to do their best. Meanwhile my least promising student, an unusually childish freshman, can now be trusted to write clear expository papers, although I doubt that she will ever shine as a literary critic.

Individual attention is obviously to the good in many educational situations; and, equally obviously, we cannot afford to give as much of it as we would like. But surely the freshman year is a time to give as much of it as we can (senior year, too, makes a special claim). One can add that, *by itself*, individual attention can be of very little use indeed, as we have all experienced to our sorrow and boredom. The attention that educates is that which we give to a student when *he* is performing, and in a defined situation.

III. Student Seminars Associated with Upperclass Lecture Courses

IF IT HAD BEEN possible to arrange it, the Committee for New College would have liked to see students who had had Freshman Seminars take, in the following year, lecture courses organized with collateral work for independent student seminar groups. This would have made it possible to test, in a measure, our belief that such work in upperclass courses would be handled particularly well by students trained at the outset to take the initiative and to work independently with their peers. But it was impossible for us to arrange such sequences within existing curricula. It was also impossible for us to test the horizontal reinforcing effect we envisage at New College from the students' taking two or more New College style courses at the same time. For a full trial of these possibilities, a new college is needed, or a curriculum in an existing college modified as a whole. Education is so complex a process, it is so dependent on continuities which, rightly, are beyond executive control (since they are the lives and minds of men), that it is probably illusory to think of a "full" trial of any one idea; even in a New College making a "New Departure," the men and women on the faculty could not be brand new and shiny—they would not be good if they were.

It is possible to move, nevertheless, in one direction rather than another, as has appeared, I hope, from the account of the Freshman Seminars, and will appear in describing the experiences of the nine colleagues who set out to add student seminars, in one form or another, to their upperclass courses. The nine semester courses offered, listed in the order in which they are reported below, dealt with the following subjects at upperclass levels:

Totalitarianism. Professor Rothman, Smith.

English Literature in the Seventeenth Century. Professor DeMott, Amherst.

Educational Psychology. Professor Miller, University of Massachusetts.

American History. Dr. Halsey of Amherst, teaching at the University of Massachusetts Summer School

Renaissance Poetry and Drama. Professor Barber, Amherst. (Also, outside the project: Modern Poetry; James Joyce.)

The Geography of Asia. Professor Stobbe, Smith.

The Arts in Fifteenth Century Florence. Professor Norton, University of Massachusetts.

Civil Liberties. Professor Beth, University of Massachusetts.

Demography. Professor Mair, Smith.

1. GOVERNMENT AT SMITH

We can best begin with Prof. Stanley Rothman's report on his use of independent student seminars in his one-semester course on totalitarianism at Smith. With fifty-one students, his course was somewhat larger than the average size projected for upperclass courses at New College, forty-one. The course dealt primarily with the Soviet Union, with some consideration of Nazi Germany. There were two lectures and one meeting of the student seminars each week, the class being divided into five groups of ten for these independent meetings. Professor Rothman's report follows:

> The function of the sections [or student seminars] was to discuss selected topics growing in part out of the lectures and in part out of the reading. The students were given a list of the topics at the beginning of the semester. At various times during the semester, well before any topic was up for discussion, an annotated bibliography covering that topic was distributed. The topic subjects included some which were very broad, such as:
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> Is Soviet totalitarianism a peculiarly Russian phenomenon? If so, what aspects of Russian history and culture were responsible for the emergence of a totalitarian regime?
>
> or
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> Is Soviet society more or less egalitarian than ours? Can one speak of the emergence of a new class in Soviet society?[6]
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> And some which were relatively narrow. For example:
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> Was Lenin a Marxist? In what way did he depart from the spirit of Marxism? What elements of Marxism did he retain?

Each student in a given section was responsible for preparing three topics during the semester. For each of these topics, she was to do approximately 250 to 300 pages of reading from the annotated bibliography, summarize her reading, and offer her own conclusions. The summaries were due in my office the day before the sections met. Toward the end of the semester, a copy of each summary was placed in a basket in the Library to be read by other members of the section. This was designed to familiarize the other members of the section with the material and was in response to the feeling of some students that oral summaries were crowding out section discussion.

The number of students and the number of topics was such that three students in each section were prepared to speak on each topic. I appointed a temporary chairman to each section, suggesting to the students that they could elect a new chairman, rotate chairmen, or follow any other procedure they wished. I also suggested to the chairmen that if they felt the work load was too heavy, they could resign from their chairmanship. With one exception, the chairmen remained as I had appointed them. The students were informed that the course represented an experiment.

During the semester I visited all the sections at least three times, moving from one to another and spending a varying amount of time

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[6]The bibliography provided by Professor Rothman on this topic is given in Appendix B.

in each. I did not enter into the discussions except on those few occasions when I felt students had wandered completely off the subject. I continually queried as many students as I could as to the success of the sections and I held two meetings with section chairmen to discuss general problems.

No mid-term examination was given. The papers were graded excellent, good, or poor, and students were informed that grades depended primarily upon the final examination. Toward the end of the semester, each section was requested to submit three or four questions which its members should like to see on the final. From these questions a master list of fifteen or sixteen questions was drawn up. This list was distributed at the beginning of the reading period. The students were told that some 40% of the final examination would be taken from the list, and it was strongly suggested that they meet as a section during the reading period for discussion purposes. Three of the sections did so meet.

Evaluation. A rather lengthy questionnaire was distributed to the students at the last meeting of the class. They were asked to return this questionnaire with the final. Thiry-four students out of the fifty-one who took the course turned in questionnaires. Since care was taken to preserve anonymity, it is impossible to say which of the students failed to turn in questionnaires.

On the whole, I thought the experiment went well and a large majority of the students felts so too. I must admit that I was somewhat worried initially. In the first sections I attended the level of discussion was not terribly high, though it is always difficult to know whether or not one's presence is affecting the discussion itself. However, I soon realized that I have had, as I think most other teachers have, a distorted picture of what students actually absorb from a course. We tend to think the students completely absorb our lectures, forgetting the gap in communication which exists. We are therefore always unpleasantly startled on final examinations, but usually manage to forget our dismay by the time the new semester rolls around. With this realization, the discussions appeared in a much more favorable light.

The papers were another matter. While the first ones were reasonably good, the papers of all the students invariably improved considerably over the semester so that the third sets submitted were all on a fairly sophisticated level. I may say that the final examination was also quite good and compared *very* favorably with previous final examinations in the course. The chairmen report that attendance at sections was satisfactory and that the students exhibited a reasonable amount of interest. This, of course, varied from section to section. My overall impression is that the students learned more from the course this year than they have in previous years.

By and large, the students seemed to agree with this evaluation. Of the thirty-four questionnaires which were returned, twenty-seven approved of the idea of self-run sections, while seven disapproved. To put it another way, twenty-seven felt they learned more from the course, in a variety of ways, than they would have from a traditional approach, while seven felt they had not. Opinions on both sides ran

from considerable enthusiasm to quite violent objections, with the greatest range taking a balanced view. Thus, even those who argued that the course had not been completely successful felt that some good had come of it, while a majority of those who liked the course very much nevertheless had some reservations.

In general students who felt that the approach had been unsuccessful did not particularly care for their chairman, but even this was not true in all cases.

Those who raised objections felt, in general, that students did not participate actively enough, that they did not have sufficient background, and that the presentation of a variety of opinions led to confusion rather than enlightenment. The following are some fairly typical comments:

> I think a system of student seminars could definitely create more interest than a straight lecture. However, in this case I did not feel more intellectual involvement because there was not enough general preparation and participation.
>
> I feel that the student sections had a certain inhibiting effect upon learning. Whereas a professor with a wide background can inject thought provoking pertinent questions into a discussion, which can be very stimulating, students with a limited knowledge cannot.
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> The theory of student seminars does tend to create more interest, but in practice I don't think there is as great a sense of intellectual involvement. Because of the domination of one or two people in the group and constant interruptions, one doesn't have a chance to explain or develop an idea. Rather, it is 'nipped in the bud.'
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> Unfortunately, many of the class periods spent in discussion turned into 'bull sessions' of relatively uninformed opinion rather than intelligent criticisms based on fact. After all, what is the purpose of 'instructors,' but to 'instruct'? Supposedly they have done additional work preparatory to giving courses which qualifies them to speak from a more informed position than their students.

On the other hand, those who in general liked the approach felt that their exposure to different points of view, both in the reading and in discussion, had improved their analytic ability and had stimulated their interest. They also felt that knowing that they were going to discuss views with fellow students made them work harder to articulate their own point of view and that they could speak more freely given the absence of the instructor.

> I felt a greater sense of intellectual involvement from the fact of small discussion and special study.
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> Yes, there is a chance to hear different views without a professor's commentary. Therefore, one must form one's own opinions upon subjects which tend to be controversial. Yes, because I can get a chance to argue when I disagree and not just have fits during lectures.
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> I do not feel that I learned as much per se of factual knowledge. Yet, the lack of breadth of materials was made up by a depth and a diversified perspective.
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> I learned more and can articulate the material better. This comes from writing about specific and, in some cases, related topics and especially speaking and thereby necessitating articulation was a tremendous help and something you don't often get. Professors tend to intimidate me with their superior knowledge.

Student opinion on individual components of the course varied. Some thought the paper topics were too broad, others thought that they were too narrow. Some thought that I should have assigned more

papers; some thought that students should do fewer papers more intensively. In general, students felt that only those who had actually prepared for the section by doing papers that week had really engaged in meaningful discussions. Finally, almost all, including those who raised serious objections to the course, agreed the approach would certainly be successful if it were part of a general program beginning in the freshman year. They argued that increasing experience would make for a greater ability to handle discussions of the type which characterized Government 36b. One or two disagreed, arguing that seminars should basically be limited to advanced students who already had a considerable grasp of the material.

The evidence of this course is by no means conclusive. The students knew that it was an experiment and this certainly affected their behavior. On the other hand, I do think that a curriculum organized along the lines suggested by the New College proposals would result in a student body with an entirely different orientation. However, implementation of the proposals would necessarily involve a radical reorientation of the entire curriculum of the college. Every effort would have to be made to proceed toward a "problem oriented" curriculum which transcended traditional subject matter boundaries. In Government 36b, as taught this year, students did develop a deeper grasp of some important general issues while failing to absorb as much substantive material as they might have. In part, this resulted from a lack of complete integration between the problems raised and substantive material. While this can be somewhat overcome, I doubt that the difficulty can be handled within the framework of a traditionally organized curriculum.

Within a traditional curriculum the approach should work best using material with which the student has already developed some familiarity or in a course which emphasizes the interpretation of limited material rather than the acquisition of a great deal of empirical data, e.g., courses in political theory or in American government, to take examples from my own discipline. One of the problems raised by dealing with the Soviet Union was that many students began the semester without any knowledge of the area, and thus were unable to orient themselves for the first several weeks of the course. Their handling of material improved as time passed. If I use the same approach next year, I will probably only do so in the second semester of what will be a year course.

Student concern with the lack of an authoritative interpretation on the part of the teacher pleased me. If the course accomplished no more than to develop an awareness in students of the variety of opinions held by reasonable men, it was a crashing success. My reservations, thus, are not to be interpreted as signifying that I felt this experiment was unsuccessful. As I have indicated earlier, I am convinced that the students who took the course got more out of it, in very important ways, than they would have had it been organized along traditional lines. I think that on the whole they exhibited more interest, demonstrated a significantly greater growth toward intellectual maturity than

have comparable students in other years. In turn I certainly developed considerable insight into the learning process and the general problem of communication between teachers and students.

When we compared experiences towards the end of the term, Professor Rothman emphasized particularly the value of the independent group discussion in leading his students to confront the genuine problems which exist in coming to conclusions of one's own. He had students come into his office and *complain* that they could not make up their minds as between differing points of view in their reading—a situation which pleased him. In other years, he reported, his practice had been to give his own interpretation in class and one other text presenting a differing view. This did not have the same effect on the students as their head-on encounters with perplexity in working up and discussing topics independently. This valuable experience depended partly on their having the opportunity for extended discussion on their own relatively unsophisticated level. And as Professor Rothman noted, better, *more* sophisticated papers and final examinations were the end result.

2. ENGLISH LITERATURE AT AMHERST

Professor Benjamin DeMott, in introducing student seminars into his course on English Literature in the Seventeenth Century, developed possibilities for giving structure to student discussion by assigning roles in advance, in somewhat the same way as Professor Von Klemperer did with her freshmen. His report follows:

Planning: In the fall term of 1959-60 I decided that I would try to adapt the New College seminar idea to an upperclass course I was scheduled to teach in the spring at Amherst College. The course is listed in the catalogue as English 42, the Renaissance: the Seventeenth Century. Thirty-seven students, all of them juniors and seniors concentrating in English, were enrolled in the course. In February, 1960, before the first meeting of the class was held, I described my plans as follows to the New College Committee:

> English 42 normally meets three times a week, and usually it is a small course with much exchange between instructor and students. Its present size is likely to cut down that exchange; partly for that reason, partly to learn whether upperclassmen can function well on their own, I plan to divide the group into four seminars that will meet at least four times (probably five) during the term for sessions of two hours each.
>
> All students in the seminars will read the same book or essays in preparation for these meetings. (The choice of the material to be read was dictated by my sense of what items in seventeenth century literary culture that I ordinarily ignore ought not to be ignored—by this, and by my own feeling that discussion of interest can best be guaranteed by pairing an old book with a relatively new one.) Five students in each seminar will be responsible for a "presentation" of these books—one will manage, two will give oral reports (I plan to read these), two will read these reports in advance of their delivery and initiate discussion of them which presumably will be carried on by the other members of the seminar. The "formal" turn of the latter will of course come at the next meeting.

The topics and books to be pursued are the following: February—The Sermon (Donne and some recent preachers). March—versions of Despair (Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, and Kierkegaard, *Sickness unto Death*). April—Versions of Carpe Diem (Poems of Herrick and *100 Poems* of E. E. Cummings). May—Versions of Freedom and Discipline (Milton's *Areopagitica* and passages from Eliot's *Notes towards a Definition of Culture.*)[7]

The obvious principle here is that of definition by contrast; if the seminars succeed the students should know more about the tone of the literary age than they would otherwise know, and they should also learn something about how to say for themselves what an Old Book is for, and they should also have found out more about how to discuss a literary subject on their own than they can find out by listening to the instructor's voice three times a week.

As the attached assignment sheets indicate, the plan thus described was put into effect with only minor changes. I divided my students into three groups (12 students in each) rather than four. I attended each meeting of the seminars for a period ranging from fifteen to forty-five minutes, depending upon how much guidance was needed.

Achievement (The Teacher's Viewpoint): I describe the seminars as an unusually interesting and significant teaching experience. This is not to say that the three groups of students each performed admirably. My visits disclosed early that two of the seminars were functioning well; interesting oral reports were delivered which in turn became the subject of lively discussion: often as I opened the seminar door to visit I was struck by the force and intensity of the talk—on occasion, argument—that was in process. Nor did I feel, for reasons mentioned below, that what I heard was ever less than an intelligent and serious response to the problem assigned. One seminar, however, functioned poorly throughout the year; I spent increasingly long periods of time with this group (the students' academic records were quite as high as those of the other seminars, and there were the same number of "intellectual leaders" in this group as in the others), and did everything I could think of to let in some excited air—but to no avail. In my view this seminar was ruined at the outset by the sulky uninterested behavior of the smartest of its members, who as it turned out was spending a senior year of Crisis and Alienation which irritated other teachers beside myself; late in the term I took the extraordinary step of asking this student not to attend the seminar in the future, but by then the damage was done. When the strongest mind in a group determines on a policy of ostentatious boredom, he can, as it were, set a tone for a whole group. I think this is what happened; if there is another explanation I could not find it. It may be noted that the seminar was not actually "impossible;" some good reports were given, a certain measure of discussion was carried on, and those of its members who handed in questionnaires were quite positive in their recommendation of the seminar idea. The point is simply that the group did not in my sense match the life and enthusiasm of the other groups mentioned.

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[7]The Notes on Procedure furnished to his seminars by Professor DeMott, together with the program for the Milton-Eliot discussion, are given in Appendix C.

To repeat, the experience of attending these groups was particularly valuable for me. The assignments I gave were detailed enough to create a structure, but the revelation for me was of the arbitrariness of such teacherly structures. I had not before had so compelling a sense of how far away my discourse can be from literary and ethical problems that strike my students as of central importance and interest. As a professional, I approach problems (without being fully aware of this truth) at something like a professional level; I direct attention to issues that are known to my peers as respectable and significant issues, and I believe it is a useful and elevating experience for students to be lifted to this level of inquiry without apology. Still, the teacher can miss (I so missed) vital problems that, however "settled" to the professional view are, to the student mind, entirely open to speculation. And rightly so. I entered a seminar to find my students arguing that Donne as a Christian ought not to have regarded it as part of Sir William Cockayne's virtue that his burial clothes were of beauty and distinction; I was at once prepared to explain the organic connection in seventeenth century religious culture between the hierarchical principle and the decencies of Christian life—as though to say, once you understand The World View, you will also grasp that Donne's sense of the religious implications of social position is in no way a fit object for criticism or even for serious consideration. But to the undergraduate, and to the non-professional this sense in fact *is* something to be paused over; large social and moral and religious issues *are* involved here, and the youthful mind has a right to descant upon them, to turn them out for observation, regardless of the "position" taken toward them in the profession. At a dozen points during the year I had it brought home to me that ideas which do not strike me as worth more than a classroom nod are nevertheless root issues for some of my most serious and valuable students. I call this discovery an important one; I do not quite know how to act upon it—but I feel that the very sight of the problem itself amounted to a significant revelation, and I am for that reason particularly pleased that I undertook this experiment.

The Achievement (The Students' View): Twenty-one students returned questionnaires. All claimed to regard the seminars as a good idea, but the tone was not of uniformly unrestrained enthusiasm. The brightest students felt that although they could not learn very much from their fellows, they could and did profit from the opportunity to function independently as reporters and commentators and discussants. The majority was not disposed to object to the teacher's presence in the seminars, but there were objections. Students felt that a closer connection between the subjects of the seminars and the work of the ordinary classroom would have been to their advantage. They are reasonable in making this point. Others argued that a preliminary discussion in the classroom setting up the problems for the entire seminar would have served a purpose. Here I am not convinced. Many students observed that certain residual element of "finding the right answer" was present in the seminar, because of the promise of the instructor's visit; I should suppose that if I had "set the problems up" in class beforehand this search for the answer might well have been more intense.

I also feel that the special advantage to me as a teacher which I described above only occurred because no detailed "orientation" was practiced beforehand.

The attempt to "summarize" the questionnaires I have in hand has cost me much effort; in the end, I do not think it a sensible labor. At least half the sheets I enclose contain remarks that are of interest or use to me—but the nature of the interest is lost in general classification. I have therefore chosen to quote in full a not un-representative series of answers to my questions which strikes me as the most intelligent response to the questionnaire, though not the most favorable. It is as follows:

1. *Do you say that the seminars of English 42 were a good idea? If so, why? If not, why?*

   Yes. It provided the student with an opportunity to "play the game," as it were, of being a critic of English literature among other critics of English literature.

2. *How could the seminars be improved?*

   The student in question feels that on several occasions the potentiality for sensible discourse among the members of what he considers to be an extremely intelligent group was not explored because the readings defied comprehension or the seminars lacked adequate direction. This might be remedied by suggestion (by the instructor) of good critical essays which would help focus the problems.

3. *Is it a nuisance to have the instructor visiting the seminars? Explain your answer a bit.*

   The student finds that the instructor serves as a "safeguard": his presence invariably destroyed (for those moments he was bodily present at least) the advantage of the student seminars noted in #1, and yet on at least one occasion his presence saved the seminar from total failure. The instructor was not needed during the Donne seminar, and his appearance brought the realization that we were students rather than *bona fide* critics and several opprobrious glances went in his direction. The Burton seminar was saved; the Herrick seminar redirected; the Milton seminar hastened to the point that the group was nearing.

4. *What was the best moment in the seminar of which you were a member? How do you account for this moment? Why did it take place?*

   The discussion of the Donne sermon. It was carefully read by most and there was a difference of *cogent* opinions. The student found some of his questions being answered by fellow students, and, he hopes, *vice versa*; there was the ebullient feeling that "we can do it, too!"

5. *What was the worst moment in the seminar of which you were a member? How do you account for this moment? Why did it take place?*

   The senseless rambling over the Kierkegaard reading. It was found to be universally incomprehensible, and the day would have been a total loss were it not for the kind intervention of the instructor and the concluding "rigged" presentation. This reading should either be taught in class, dropped from the seminar schedule, or supplemented by critical or explanatory writings.

6. *How much, if anything, do you think there is in the notion that students can learn best from each other—and* in *a seminar?*

   A number of instances have convinced the student that there are things to be learned from his fellow students, and that the seminars provide a convenient and well-organized means for batting about their ideas without the inhibiting factor of "being marked" for what is said. Casual two- or three-man discussions often prove reckless and consequently wrong. How-

ever, the student was also convinced that it would be foolhardy to assert that students learn BEST in a seminar. Rather it might be said that they are, after a seminar, best *prepared* to learn. Satisfactory resolutions of literary difficulties are all the more welcome after these problems have been struggled with by the students, and it might be wise for the instructor to devote a class hour to the subjects of the seminars after they have taken place. One might reply that this will cause those preparing reports to look for the "right answers"—but isn't that what the student should look for anyway?

Conclusions: In my opinion the student-led seminar at the upper-class level has a good deal to recommend it. The matter to be discussed must be simpler than the matter I chose; the connection between this matter and the line of classroom teaching must be emphasized more than I emphasized it; and the teacher's presence is probably, on balance, A Good Thing. I am not convinced that these seminars can work at any level without a very high degree of organization on the part of the teacher—of topics, methods of pursuing them, and the like. But the strong argument that I see for keeping the teacher available, allowing him to visit as I visited, is that the discoveries he makes on the occasions when he does visit are in themselves too valuable to be foregone. I may once again say that I think it not sentimental to claim that I am a better teacher for having ventured in the directions described in this report.

3. EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY AT THE UNIVERSITY

As one would expect, some of our disappointments came where the project of working in independent groups was given to students with little commitment to the subject and/or little cohesion. This kind of difficulty was experienced by Dr. Robert Miller of the University of Massachusetts and Dr. C. Van R. Halsey of Amherst; Dr. Miller gave a large, required course on Educational Psychology in the School of Education of the University; Dr. Halsey a relatively small course in problems in American History at the University of Massachusetts Summer School.

Dr. Miller reported that the fact that his course was required for all students in a degree program meant that many had a merely perfunctory interest in the subject or no interest at all. He organized the course into groups of eight or nine for independent meetings supplementary to the lectures. Initial seminar planning sessions with Dr. Miller formulated problems to be pursued in relation to each main part of the course: thus during the first four weeks, on motivation, the student seminars were occupied with reports by their members on their own experiences with problems of educational motivation, and these individual reports were to be organized by each group for possible presentation to the class as a whole. Dr. Miller emphasized that he would be available at any time as a resource person. Unfortunately, in Dr. Miller's judgment, this interesting program was carried through effectively in only two of the ten study groups; only about one quarter of the class really took hold. "I gave them instructions, told them to

jump in and swim, and that I would be standing by with a life preserver if they yelled 'Help.' " But, Dr. Miller reported, the great majority never called for help; they did not notice that they were under water. For the students who took hold, the experience of formulating problems and mobilizing their own experience was valuable; but the majority never got a problem into clear focus, so that they had no *need* for consultation, either with the instructor, or with the colleagues in their discussion group. These uninvolved students for the most part merely "sat it out," often taking the attitude that the whole procedure was an experiment about which they were dubious from the outset. In retrospect, they observed that they needed to be forced, "needed a kick in the pants."

It is clear that much of the difficulty which Dr. Miller's course encountered derived from the habits and attitudes of the majority in the student group involved. To make the student seminar group a viable academic situation for such students would probably require more leverage on their inertia than a one semester course could hope for. There was the added difficulty that the students were asked to draw directly on their own experience, for example their experiences of motivation. This is an exacting sort of undertaking, since, to make it fruitful, the student must achieve a firm grasp of some conceptual frame by which to organize an account of matters that are otherwise very elusive. A group with relatively little feeling for disciplined analysis was asked to perform quite difficult acts of organized self-consciousness; the majority failed and so were left with little or nothing, so far as the student seminars were concerned. It should be added that Dr. Miller's class mastered the basic materials presented in his lectures as well as other classes who in other years did not have the student seminar experience.

4. AMERICAN HISTORY IN SUMMER SCHOOL

Dr. Halsey's smaller group at the University of Massachusetts Summer School was not so much amorphous as disparate: at one extreme, there were three graduate students in history, at the other, college students making up failures. Dr. Halsey organized the six-weeks course around two key problems in American history, building a quite extensive reading program around two of the pamphlets developed in the Amherst College course on Problems in American Civilization, in which he had been taking an active part. There were introductory lectures at the beginning of each three week unit, and concluding lectures, with class discussion at intervals of problems of methodology growing out of the specific materials under consideration; but the number of hours when the class met as a whole was cut down very drastically indeed. The students were organized into two seminar groups and invited to select individual projects from a carefully worked out set of

readings supplementary to the reading done by everybody. The seminars thus afforded opportunities for mutual enrichment through reports on reading which everybody had a reason to find relevant.

The students enjoyed the problem method, Dr. Halsey's lectures, and the free time for reading provided by his keeping the lectures to a minimum. They were not in most cases enthusiastic about the independent student seminars, though they liked the challenge afforded by the preparation of reports and found that they got something from the interchange of ideas about the problems under study. They seem to have found themselves in an academic situation, thanks to the clear-cut way the problem and readings had been worked out; but the trouble was that they did not operate effectively in this situation: reports were often dull, discussion disorganized. Dr. Halsey concluded that, if he were to do the thing again, the students should have a longer period of orientation before they met by themselves, and should be given more instruction in how to conduct a fruitful seminar session. Obviously a summer session provides a difficult situation in which to establish an unfamiliar pattern of learning.

5. ENGLISH AT AMHERST

To counter the impression, which these two experiences might foster, that success or failure with independent group work varies directly with the general ability and commitment of the students, I can refer here to my own experience, over four years, with independent group work by Amherst students in advanced courses in English: on the whole it has gone well, often very well, but there have been some failures. It has been the academic context in which the independent sessions took place, rather than abilities of the participants, that has been chiefly decisive.

The staple activity of the student seminar groups in my courses has been reading poems or passages aloud and talking about their meaning and quality. As any teacher of literature is well aware, the passages from a poet that are read aloud and discussed in class are apt to be the ones to which students return; yet the class time one can give to reading aloud is limited. The "Reading Groups," as I have called my student seminars, were set up with the aim of extending the students' experience of the saying and hearing of poetry, with discussion to bring out the qualities of what is read. Four or five students has proved to be the right number, for this permits each man, each week, to read an assigned poem or passage and talk with the others about it. Usually the group has been asked to elect a moderator, called a "steward," who distributes assignments, arranges the meeting place and time, takes attendance. He keeps the clock so that each poem and reader get a roughly equal share of time; but he is not set up as the leader of the discussion—hence the choice of the name "steward." This standard operat-

ing procedure has ben varied a good deal in setting up reading groups in different years and different courses; beginning in 1956, I have used the arrangement, in one form or another, four times in a course in modern poetry, once in a course on James Joyce and once in a course on Renaissance poetry and drama (this last was officially part of our 1959-60 project).

There has been all but universal agreement that the reading groups have been useful and pleasant. Occasionally, students went overboard in praise of the arrangement—the year it was first introduced I received some letters from students telling how much it meant to them to be put in a situation where they could work and communicate on their own, free of domination of a teacher's personality: one individualist wrote that the reading group seemed "probably the most valuable method of teaching English" (!) This sort of extreme enthusiasm has been matched, once in a while, by hostility to the group work from an occasionally brilliant, highly-literary student for whom reading poetry aloud and talking about it was a natural part of everyday life, so that for him the reading group arrangement was not a liberation from supervision but an invasion of privacy. One such complained that his group's sessions became "a Poetry-Rorschach hour, which is even less interesting than the ink blots. Each person would jump on his particular hobby horse and ride off . . ." Individual groups have varied a great deal in spirit; many develop a high morale, with camaraderie and energetic group purpose; many simply meet together, do the job and part, taking the independent session as one more good thing in a full life; a fraction (perhaps one group in five) tend to fall apart from indifference or burst apart from conflicts of personalities. I have been surprised, however, by how little "personalities" have been a problem; college social life trains students rigorously in the art of making do with each other. Their sociable virtues are evident in the way they normally run their discussions without conflict as to who should be boss.

Many of the comments have stressed the value of the reading group as a *different* kind of activity from others:

> The main value . . . was to have a good time discussing poetry—not a sterile learning but relaxed and enjoyable. At certain times we all valued the opportunity to prove we were complex individuals also.
>
> In addition to becoming familiar with the assigned poems, the opportunity to gain exposure to novel points of view on the part of people who are not usually heard from in class was valuable.
>
> This kind of experience is one that I wish I could have had more of at Amherst. This year I lived in a hall where 4 out of 8 of us were writers and interested in literature. But rarely were we able to get together, all of us, and never for more than five minutes talk about a specific piece of literature . . . . I learned in this seminar that it was possible to do this.
>
> Another reason for continuing these groups is that it is a lesson in communicating at a student-student level thoughts which are important. This happens all too rarely around campus.

By encountering the poet in different situations, classroom, studying, reading group—more than once, a real appreciation comes.

Even a student who did not like his group's steward and reported that his group "suffered from lack of personality . . . people either bored or boring or too shy to speak," added that "occasionally, it was quite good to see a group of students communicating together on intellectual subjects in some formal manner without the presence of a teacher."

I have found that my sustained attention to the group's procedures is important. One can do a good deal by talking to the class about how the groups can best function, by visiting each during an early session, by asking searchingly in class about the way the sessions are going. Seeding able students in each group is useful, too, though it cannot entirely insure against the "lack of personality" that sometimes occurs. Tactful scheduling can also help to guard against breakdowns; the independent sessions should not start until the course has gained momentum, and they need not go on into the last weeks of the term, when pressures from papers and examinations take over from everything else.

But in my experience, as I have said, by all odds the most important factor in keeping the group work alive is the academic context established for each session. The poems or passages themselves, and the experience of reading aloud and listening, have of course an intrinsic interest. The students' anonymous evaluations, over the years, refer regularly to the value of reading aloud as a way for "each guy to get over his public embarrassment of poetry." "In the beginning, students appeared to be somewhat reluctant to 'put themselves' into their reading. This ceased after a while." "I find that I get a good deal out of hearing someone read a poem well—it oftens 'opens up' the poem as well as any criticism can." But reading aloud by itself has clearly not been enough to engage the full participation of most groups; whenever the course has not raised questions, directly or indirectly, about what is read aloud, preparation for the reading groups falls off, discussion tends to become perfunctory. During one term, I tried letting the reading groups almost entirely alone, except for making assignments—partly because I was too busy (with proposals for educational reform!). The result was that after the middle of the term many of the groups began to fall apart.

The timing of what is read and discussed in the groups has proved crucial. In teaching modern poetry, the first arrangement tried had the reading groups read poems at the end of one week by the poet or poets to be discussed in class the next week. This did not work nearly as well as a schedule which provided for a Monday lecture on a particular poet, readings in him at the independent sessions in the middle of the week (never of the same poems discussed in class), then class discussion about his work

on Friday. The leading ideas and issues thrown out on Monday were thus available for testing and development in considering the things read in the group session. The concrete experience of the reading always seems to be rich when conducted in the presence of critical ideas. This importance of timing was apparent in the course on Elizabethan drama: a student seminar session reading aloud from the first part of *Dr. Faustus, before* it was focussed on in class, was a frost, whereas the reading from the last part, after critical discussion, was exciting and satisfying. So too with the reading of passages from James Joyce. The problem is to keep the independent reading in a proper tension with the developing argument of the course—neither too far ahead nor too far behind.

The group work can also be fruitfully related to papers the students are writing, two or three reporting one week, the others the next week, to give more time. They may describe to the group their central ideas for a paper in preparation, illustrated by reading passages they have selected. This order works well, *provided* that they are well along in real work on the project; my experience has been that this arrangement is effectual when the paper is being written well before the end of term, but not if they are meeting during the hectic rush at the end of term, when in practice most of them are doing everything at the last minute. The undertaking is particularly hazardous where the papers in preparation are elaborate and argumentative, as was the case in my course on Elizabethan drama: several presentations, by students who had not really found a subject yet and were merely floundering around, were very painful indeed. Towards the end of term, it has been better to ask them to tell their groups about their papers *after* the papers have been handed in to the instructor. Thus in the modern poetry course, where towards the end each man picks out a single recent poet for intensive study, and after turning in his paper has half of a reading group session in which to present some of his poet's poems, interest has often been "very high indeed."

6. ART HISTORY AT THE UNIVERSITY

There is no doubt that the relative cohesiveness of the Amherst undergraduate student body—or that part of it interested in advanced study of literature—helped my reading groups to work. But cohesion can also be produced, when dealing with a various student body, by setting up of a student seminar limited to those students willing to take hold of the opportunity. At the University of Massachusetts, Prof. Paul Norton called for volunteers for a student seminar from a fairly large and miscellaneous group of students who were enrolled in his course in the history of Renaissance art. He set up the seminar as an alternative to the regular course: instead of being responsible for the whole sweep of Renaissance art history

covered by his three weekly lectures, the seminar group was to attend his lectures but to study intensively, by projects, the arts of fifteenth century Florence, meeting weekly, without his presence. During the semester, Professor Norton "met individually with each student to assist . . . in the selection of a topic, and later in finding materials and in organizing . . . ideas." Each student, after presenting his lecture to the group, with slides, prepared a final paper which Professor Norton used as a basis for a final mark, along with an examination on a question relevant to the papers.

Five of the ten students who elected to try the experiment dropped out: three whose academic standing was poor seem to have felt that they could not handle the work; two had schedules such that they felt they could not devote sufficient time to the experiment. But the remaining five took hold in a way that warms one's heart. They were all girls, sophomores or above, and were "very hard and conscientious workers. They organized themselves." They scheduled their own weekly meetings, and in the last part of the course met twice a week to give time to complete what they had undertaken. There were difficulties in getting materials, which were made up for in several cases by going to Amherst, Smith, and further: as one student commented "If a student has the opportunity, I think it is good experience and interesting to do research in the Boston libraries—*Fogg* very good." It is worth noting that, unlike many undergraduates, these were led to realize what a good library means, and a good catalogue. More generally, student evaluations give witness to an active attitude:

> Gained skill in doing research, searching for the necessary material and compiling it most effectively. It was enjoyable to "delve" into books and really get a wide scope of your material. It was also a challenge, for me, to take a disputable subject, do research, and take a stance on the dispute. Independence is wonderful! I think we also gained skill in art of being a "thinking person."

The plan of devoting the whole of a session to the presentation of one member, which often seems to drag in student seminars on other subjects, appears to have worked well for this group's work on art history, partly because of the use of slides, partly thanks to the group's using Professor Norton's lectures as a model:

> Method of giving reports was much like the way Dr. Norton presents his lectures. Research was done by the student, who supplemented his lecture, then, with slides. The other students were free to ask questions (of which there were many), state what they believed and give other ideas and information about the given topic. Much was gained from the lectures; the other students took notes when lecture was given.

Another student, however, reports that "there was relatively little criticism when reports were given" and adds that "an occasional visit from the professor would perhaps give us a few new ideas and questions." Two others expressed a similar wish while two underlined the value of being on

their own, with a stated preference for "class without instructor—group more at ease, easier to plan time for meetings—discussion more smooth."

In his report, Professor Norton notes that the intensive method of learning put a strain on library facilities not fully met by the University and Amherst Libraries combined. He emphasized also that the course was only successful for those with a genuine desire to learn, and indicated his belief that below average, or even average students would profit less from this sort of seminar than from conventional teaching. "Perhaps I should not have been surprised to find that at a state university half of a group of students was unable to take such a course . . . I am led to conclude that this kind of course can only produce good results with a well-selected group of students." Granting this limitation (which the students themselves insisted on in their questionnaires), one cannot but be impressed by the opportunity the seminar gave those who took hold; they had a kind of experience otherwise unlikely: "This is a good kind of course for a freshman or sophomore who, ordinarily, would have little experience with independent work."

7. GEOGRAPHY AT SMITH

The course on the Geography of Asia given to nineteen upperclass students at Smith by Prof. Helen Stobbe did not, as it worked out, employ a pattern which had any close relation to those envisaged in *The New College Plan*, but her experience has interest as it reflects the readiness of students to assume responsibility. Professor Stobbe reported:

> After a three weeks introduction by the instructor, who explained geographic factors and their relationship to people in areas, the members of the class organized the work and gave papers. The areas studied included 1) East Asia, 2) Southeast Asia, 3) South Asia, 4) Southwest Asia and 5) Russia.
>
> The students selected their own areas and topics and conducted the class. They worked in teams of from two to four students and decided what was important in an area to cover. No reading lists were given, but suggestions were made if a student came to the instructor for help or advice. There was also no reading period list given at the end of the course. The students sought out their own material. There was a very definite improvement in ability to find and gather material, and in the organization and grasp of the material as the term progressed.
>
> The oral reports ranged from 30 to 50 minutes in length. Because of the size of the class no student gave more than one report, which she handed in as a finished long paper before the end of the term. Each student explained to the class how she had found her material and gave her bibliography. After reading or giving her report, or during it, the other students asked her questions and sometimes there were enthusiastic discussions.

A prepared written was given as a mid-semester examination with a choice of questions to be discussed. The written had been announced at the beginning of the semester, and in mimeographed form was given to the students two weeks before it was due.

A final examination, similar to those given other years, was given the students. They did equally well, and sometimes better, than students in former years, who had been taught in the orthodox lecture way.

A text, *The Pattern of Asia,* edited by Ginsburg, was used but no definite assignments were made . . .

The class was not of unusually high scholastic average. No student was on the Registrar's list, however, or therefore below diploma grade . . . The type of work the students did shows, in my opinion, that this type of teaching can bring good results from Smith College students with medium to high averages.

A questionnaire was given each student along with her final examination. She had been told that this would be done. The answers to some of the questions have been summarized on the accompanying question sheet.

Asked "Have you gained in the following ways?" about such things as "methods of finding source materials," "ability to analyze and evaluate source materials," "ability to work independently," two-thirds to three-quarters of the students checked "yes." But since the questionnaires were in this yes-or-no form, it is not possible to use them to see into the students' experience. Professor Stobbe reported that "all students would have preferred a smaller group and gave twelve as an ideal number . . . A[illegible] of the students had been enthusiastic throughout the term, and I felt the class had been successful."

8. GOVERNMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY

Professor Beth tried an extremely open plan in a course on Civil Liberties for fourteen students at the University of Massachusetts, and came to the conclusion that a tighter structure would give better results. He lectured on a given topic at a one hour-and-a-quarter meeting each week, then the students met in two groups for a similar period, with one student in each responsible for delivering a half-hour report on whatever aspect of the topic interested him, then leading discussion. A long paper, "a think piece" rather than research paper, was due at the end of the course and provided the chief basis for the grade. Professor Beth had intended only to listen to the report in each group meeting, and then leave. But he found himself staying on to keep the discussion going and give it form. Topics chosen included "Group Action on Segregation," "Religious Liberty," "Religious Education," "What is Loyalty?"

The quality of the reports was uneven, though the students all enjoyed the opportunity to give them and to lead discussion. Whereas the more committed and experienced students followed up suggestions about reading and used it effectually in their reports, others did not know what to do with so much freedom and did very little. Some of the subjects chosen by the students to report on did not lend themselves well to discussion—e.g. "Sunday Blue Laws." And there was a tendency for students "to 'bull' their way through the course except on the day each was reporting."

It is fascinating to see how the students themselves, in their evaluations, propose changes in the direction of a tigher structure. (I had the same response from my students when I tried an open arrangement.) Professor Beth's students liked the course and the seminar arrangement, and wanted it to go better—wanted to be made to do better by it.

> This course certainly was different. That is not a condemnation, it is a "thank-God." Perhaps only because it was different from the usual memory teacher-does-the-thinking course, perhaps that made it interesting to some, and would make it interesting to others.
>
> Of all the courses I've had in elementary, high school and college, there have only been one or two teachers who have changed my way of looking at things. I can honestly add this combination of Govt. 64 and Mr. Beth to my list.
>
> This was the first seminar course that I have had and I found it very fruitful. I believe that a course covering such an area as civil liberties could not have been handled in any other way.
>
> I thought that the seminars were excellent. It was a challenge to conduct one and it was also an opportunity to discuss certain sub-topics in detail. I wish that perhaps we could have had more discussion and that in certain cases it could have been livelier but this was up to us.

This last student goes on to suggest, as did others, that perhaps they should be given more papers to make them "formulate our ideas." Others suggested an examination to make them do more reading. To improve discussion, it was suggested that the particular area of the topic to be covered by the next student report should be announced in advance. Another suggestion was to assign two people to report on each topic. Or again: "at the beginning of the class period let each student make a two or three minute report which is assigned for each of us. Otherwise some students might not read the assignment at all." Or again: "A possible suggestion for next year is to have three lectures of one hour each, with the first one being your lecture, the second being a report, and the third general discussion between your lecture and the student lecture." This last came from a man who said that the research involved in the discussion section, and the handling of the class, "is an experience that every college student should have." Another comment runs:

> On the whole the course was one of the most stimulating ones I have had. The lecture-seminar setup was good because it presented the background ideas for the discussion in the seminar.

> To improve the seminar section I think that the person responsible for the seminar could prepare broad questions and submit them on Tuesday so that opinions on the various points could be more carefully thought out and supported. This small amount of preparation on the part of the rest of the class would help both the discussion leader and the students to hit the basic issues faster and with more precision.

Perhaps to say so is to labor the obvious, but *these students, because they were given the initiative, became aware of their failures to take it.* In a slack discussion class (such as we all experience, whether because of the students' failure to prepare or our own) there need to be no discomfort, because every teacher knows how to go on talking in a void and how to prod answers of a sort out of a passive, indifferent group of students. Of course discussion classes led by a teacher are extremely valuable, as are lectures—there is no thought of eliminating either. But the evidence we are encountering suggests that discussion where the students are given responsibility for the initiative can provide a most useful third way of learning. The various suggestions of Professor Beth's students for giving more form and commitment to their meetings are an example of the sort of constructive participation in their own education which develops when independent group work is got under way.

9. DEMOGRAPHY AT SMITH

Professor Mair's report on his course in Demography, which follows, is a final illustration of the many possibilities for the organization of independent work by groups of students which can be opened up by different teachers in different disciplines. A particularly exciting feature of his term was the arrangement by which during the second part of the course he gave each member of a student seminar a particular "specialty" in the analysis of population problems, for which she was responsible week after week. His report follows:

> The content of the course, "Population Problems and Policies," falls into two major divisions: first, an introduction to the terminology, methods of measurement, and chief generalizations of the field of demography; and second, a study of the population situation of the moment in various countries and areas of the world. Reading is scattered through a large number of books and journals, though the recent publication of two collections of articles has simplified this problem somewhat.
>
> In the past the course has usually met for three one hour sessions per week using a room that permits all the students to sit around a single large table. In some years one one-hour and one hour-and-a-half session have been used. In the early part of the course there has been a considerable amount of rather informal lecturing by the instructor, with easy opportunity for questions from the class. The principal method of instruction, however, has been group discussion in which the

instructor has exerted control over the group in order to ensure that significant matters would be discussed and important points brought out. The subject of the course is one that students generally find both interesting and important and their reaction to the teaching method has been generally favorable.

The Procedure for the Experiment. In the experiment, the organization of the subject matter of the course was retained virtually unchanged from previous years. The final enrollment of ten students included two seniors, four juniors, and four sophomores not specially selected. The experiment was described and the possibility of changing courses without prejudice made clear at the first meeting. For purposes of discussion the students were divided into two groups. Sophomores, juniors, and seniors were divided about equally between the two groups and an informal attempt was made, on the basis of the instructor's previous acquaintance with several members of the class, to ensure that there would be at least some spontaneous talkers in each group.

During the first section of the course there were two lectures each week. These were reasonably formal, but some questioning from the floor was permitted. The discussion groups met for one hour each, the second beginning twenty-five minutes after the first. This permitted the instructor to be present at the beginning of both discussions or at the end of both discussions but prevented him from being present throughout the entire period with both groups.

At the first lecture the instructor read a discussion of population questions which involved six fictitious persons, each presenting a particular point of view. Each student was assigned one of these persons and instructed to pay special attention to his point of view and to be prepared at the first discussion session to defend that position. At the first discussion meeting the instructor had the students identify themselves to each other by writing their names on cards displayed in front of them around the table. He then simply asked them to begin talking about the matters presented in the lecture. After twenty minutes he left, asking them to continue their discussion and to prepare jointly before the end of the hour a list of the chief problems of population, as they saw them, and of possible avenues to the solution of these problems. The one senior in each group would be responsible to see that this report reached the instructor. (This was the only gesture in the direction of appointing a chairman that was ever made in the course. At all later sessions of the discussion groups there was no chairman.)

Throughout the first section of the course uniform assigned readings were prescribed for all the students; an hour examination was given at the end of this period. The instructor was present at the beginning of each discussion meeting, but often stayed only long enough to answer any questions the students might have—which sometimes were not numerous. Each week he left with the group a typewritten proposed outline for discussion, to be used as the members of the group saw fit.

During the second section of the course, the plan of meetings was modified. The lectures were reduced to one a week and the length of the discussion period was increased to one hour-and-a-half. The two groups met simultaneously. The instructor spent an average of perhaps fifteen minutes with each group each week. In most weeks he visited both groups but in some weeks he visited only one or neither.

The subject matter of this second section of the course was organized on a geographical basis, each week being devoted to a different section of the earth. To ensure that each student would feel that she was responsible to be present and to contribute at each session, and to give a certain continuity to the work of each, the students were assigned general topics on which they were to become specialists. The six topics were fertility, mortality, migration, economic implications of population developments, social implications of population developments, social implications, and public policy implications. Each week every student was to report briefly (in five to ten minutes) on her findings with respect to the area under discussion that week. A small amount of uniform reading was assigned for all students. There were no major seminar-style reports, so that students could not feel that in a given week somebody else was responsible, with the result that they could coast. For the rest of her preparation the student was to find reading for herself. For each topic the instructor provided bibliographic suggestions to assist the students in locating material that would be useful.

The instructions to the students were that at the beginning of each week's discussion the individual reports would be presented. Other members of the group would be permitted to interrogate the reporter if they wished to. After the individual reports, general discussion of the population situation, problems, and policies in the area of the week were to be discussed. No discussion outline was furnished during this second half of the course. The students were not required to stay through the entire hour-and-a-half period if they did not choose to. In fact, they were usually there for almost the whole time, though on one or two occasions the meetings broke up about a half-hour early.

In the Smith College academic schedule, the last two weeks of the semester are devoted to a reading period in which no class sessions are held. For the experimental course, students were asked to prepare a paper of five to ten pages on a topic of their own choice. It was suggested that they might use this opportunity to consolidate some of the work they had done on their specialty, or to do more intensive reading about some one country or situation than they had been able to accomplish during the main body of the course. This opportunity permitted a student to compensate for the superficiality that she is likely to sense some of the time in her week-to-week accomplishment. The paper was to be considered a part of the final examination.

Methods of Observing and Assessing the Experiment. At the end of the first section of the course, each student was asked to prepare a one paragraph comment on the course up to that point, with particular emphasis on the instructorless discussions. A lengthy questionnaire was

distributed at the time of the reading period to be returned at the final examination. Both of these evaluations were obtained from all students.

Results of the Experiment. On the basis of the performance of the students on the hour tests and the final examination, it did not appear that their degree of mastery of the material of the course differed substantially from that of previous years. With so small a sample, it is not possible to be really certain on this point. The final grades consisted of six B's of various kinds and four C's of various kinds. Two years ago, when the course was of about the same size, there were seven B's and four C's. The grades are of course not so much an absolute measure of accomplishment as a reflection of the instructor's feeling that the level of performance was not markedly lower or higher than normal.

The student reaction to the course was on the whole favorable, both at mid-term and at the end. There was considerable approval of the discussion groups and a particularly general feeling that they had gone better than the students had initially expected them to. The students liked the small size of the groups because it gave them a chance to become well acquainted with each other and allowed plenty of time for all to participate. On the other hand, many expressed concern about the fact that there tended to be a lack of depth. Difficult questions that arose were passed by. Critical information was sometimes lacking.

Some comments at mid-semester are as follows:

> On the whole, almost all students actively contributed throughout the entire session . . . . the subjects for discussion are covered, but it seems generally superficial coverage.
>
> The greatest advantage to the sessions so far is one somewhat apart from discussions. It is that we all know each other fairly well and are now quite at ease in the group.
>
> So far, our discussions have served two main purposes: 1) the mechanical repeating and discussing of material covered in reading and lecture. This may not be the prime ideal behind the discussions, but we have been able to clear up things we didn't understand. There's usually one of us who can explain what someone else doesn't understand. This has been very valuable, and has led to a minimum of cramming and panic before the written.
>
> After the mechanics are over we usually jump into more speculative discussion. 'What would happen if . . .' 'How would one achieve this . . .'. This is a lot of fun, and good practice in applying what we have learned to hypothetical situations. We have (in our opinion) come up with a few pretty good things, too.
>
> At the beginning I was uncertain that discussion groups would be very successful. However, as the weeks continued, they became worthwhile, not only in clarifying the assigned material, but also creating much curiosity and discussion over hypothetical situations and questions.
>
> Discussions—everyone is generally well prepared. Each has to contribute and do her part as there is no professor present. There is, however, a tendency to dismiss a problem or topic before the difficulty has been solved, or it has been thoroughly discussed. The complexities of many issues are being missed.

The final course evaluation questionnaire indicated that students felt the course was more interesting, informative, and stimulating than other courses they had taken in the social sciences. Given the tendency of students to rate courses somewhat favorably on evaluation sheets, the ratings here should probably be considered satisfactory but not out-

standing. The one category in which the course appears to have seemed genuinely superior was "Useful as a way of learning to find information."

There was general endorsement of the division of time between lectures and discussions that was employed, though one student would have preferred two lectures throughout the semester. The success of the discussion groups was judged to be about medium. Offered five categories in which to rank the course, no student chose the extreme "very successful" or the opposite "very unsuccessful."

Asked "What do you consider the major strengths of these meetings?", students commented:

> Members were adequately prepared. Interest in the subject.
>
> We could discuss more freely than we could have if you had been there. Because of the size, we could all talk.
>
> Just by virtue of their being discussion groups, they were successful. We had a fairly responsive group and didn't sit and fool around just because you weren't there.

To the question "What do you consider the weakest aspects of these meetings?", came these replies (some of which disagree with those above):

> Many students ill prepared—have not done reading, etc. Tendency to relax—not work up to capacity.
>
> There was no way to silence occasionally loquacious or off the topic conversations or discourses and no way to encourage comment from whomever was usually silent.

Eight of the ten students felt that the ideal size for such discussion groups is either five or six.

Four thought the instructor was present about the right amount of time; four would have liked him present a little more (though not "much more"); and one would have liked him present "never." One student thought that the fact that the instructor appeared at irregular times "kept everyone on their toes," but the other nine thought this had no effect on preparation. (The instructor suspects that there was some effect, nonetheless.)

The absence of a chairman in the discussion groups seemed somewhat unsatisfactory to three of the students, but "very satisfactory" to five. Only one stated unequivocally that she felt the other students did not bear a fair share of the burden of the discussion groups, but only two were certain that they did. Eight felt that "it varied."

"If you had it to do over again, would you take this course?" All ten students replied that they would (if one includes one student who checked "no" but whose reason—"I was interested and am still interested in the material covered"—seems to indicate that it was a slip of the pen, especially as the student recommends that this course be taught in generally the same manner in the future). Nine of the ten students recommend that this course be taught in the same manner in the future, and seven recommend the introduction of discussion groups with no instructor present in other courses at Smith. Some general comments are these:

> It was a valuable lesson in learning—from the standpoint of research as well as discussion. The course material was covered adequately but even more valuable was the independence allowed the students.
>
> Had I the choice again, I would take the course if only for the organization.
>
> For me the course was probably the most interesting I have ever taken, because I tend not to enter into discussions, and with the informal group with so few, I not only spoke up because I was interested, but because I felt I truly wanted to take an active part.

Only one student expressed outright opposition to the idea of organizing a college in which most of the work outside the natural sciences was taught through the use of lectures and students-only discussion groups. Most of the favorable replies, however, embodied some reservations, implying that students would need special training to acquire the skills and motivations necessary.

Implications of the Experiment. In assessing the implications of this experiment, a few reservations should be borne in mind. The group studied was very small, and in all probability experienced some general lift in morale as a result of the very fact that it was participating in an experiment—indeed in a somewhat radical experiment as the students saw it. The feeling of independence engendered by the way the course was taught met with approval, but it seems to have resulted not only from the absence of the instructor at the discussions, but also from the requirement that students find some of the reading matter for themselves. The morale of the instructor was kept high both by the experimental nature of the course and relatively small number of students he had to supervise. If there had been 100 students, he would have had much less time for each discussion group than he did, and the burden of paper grading would have seemed quite different, even if he had attended no discussions at all.

The following hypotheses appear to draw support from this experiment:

a. It is possible for good students to have useful discussions in a course without an instructor present.

b. For this to work, methods must be devised, either in prior training or in the design of the particular course, to ensure that each student will feel personal responsibility of some sort at each session.

c. The optimum size for the discussion groups is five or six.

d. It is not necessary that the groups have a chairman and may well be positively desirable not to have one. (If such discussion groups were a normal part of student experience, it seems likely that in some cases students would learn to introduce a permanent or rotating chairmanship even when none was specified by the instructor. The usefulness of a chairman would decline, however, if his existence tended to lower the sense of responbility of the other members of the group.)

e. The device of an agenda for the discussion groups prepared by the instructor is useful. (Perhaps ways could be devised to allow students to participate in preparation of the agenda.)

f. Ways should be devised to get feed-back from the discussion groups to the instructor and from a discussion group to its own meeting of the following week, so that difficult questions are followed up rather than dropped by the wayside.

g. The kind of independent study permitted in this course does not function at its best under a five-course program.

h. Effective use of this method of teaching would be facilitated by the introduction of flexibility as to the number and duration of class meetings.

It is the instructor's opinion that student discussions are particularly well suited to the subject matter of this course. His expectation is that he will wish to experiment further with this method of teaching.

IV. The Amateurism of the American Undergraduate, the Course System and the Problem of Initiative

OUR PROJECT was experiment with exception to a rule—the rule that it is the presence of a teacher which defines an academic situation. To evaluate our efforts to create exceptions, it may be useful to reflect a little about the rule and the logic behind it.

We all, I think, feel a reluctance, at least initially, about giving up meeting our undergraduate students in favor of leaving them to go it alone part of the time. And no wonder. The heart and soul of good undergraduate teaching in this country lies in our readiness to go to meet our students, to engage their interest. We design our lectures with their ignorance and their imagination in mind. In discussion we let them talk, even when they have little to say, making it our business to translate back and forth between the terms they bring with them and the terms which our discipline has to offer. This sort of undergraduate teaching is our virtue—and our necessity. For unlike graduate or professional students, who are committed apprentices, eager to become what their teachers are and ready to accept on its own terms the discipline they are entering, most of our undergraduates in the liberal arts are *amateurs*. They do not go to college to become historians or economists or critics, but "for a good liberal arts education." They have ulterior motives about doing well in their studies, but not, in most cases, about *what* they study.

It is our privilege, and our problem, when working with undergraduates, to address ourselves chiefly to people who, except about grades, have an amateur's disinterestedness. But we are pulled towards becoming salesmen and/or taskmasters. At their best, our amateur public bestow their attention in an unforced, undutiful way while coming at their studies with their whole humanity; at their worst, they just cannot be bothered. And among individuals some of the best as well as the worst are apt to feel the pull of campus life—all that busy-ness which most students cannot ignore, even if they want to, because it is serious business, since College Life is preparation for Life after College. In a time when families are always moving about in all senses of the words, students in college have a great deal to do, apart from their studies. in sorting themselves out and finding themselves. The weakening of vertical lines of influence in our society in favor of horizontal may be exaggerated; but it is a fact that most students care more for the good opinion of their peers than of their teachers. By a powerful logic, many of them *have* to care more, because "what you were in college" will

strongly influence the place assigned you later by your contemporaries as the age group moves on into the world of business, professions and suburbanite social life.

Of course there are a number of exceptional undergraduates who find a vocation by deciding that what they most want to do in life is to work with the subject they have become most interested in college. In a very few colleges these may almost be the dominant group. Much of our most delightful and rewarding teaching is with such students; we could not do without them. But, for the purpose of the present discussion, the committed intellectuals among our undergraduates are not the crucial element. We are considering the logic behind our system of courses and credits and wondering what can be done to encourage students to work more independently. The committed intellectuals do not need the course and credits system in the same degree as others, to keep them going. They do a great deal of independent work already, and are more and more commonly excused from some course work to do it.

The sort of students who arouse our concern here are not those who have taken over the initiative in their intellectual life despite the course system, but the students who are kept going by the course system, *and at the same time limited by it.* The intelligence and energy of the latter may be as high as any, and they constitute, at most colleges, the great majority of students. The very intensity of our efforts, in courses, to get the most out of them (or do the most for them) tends to take the initiative away from them. We talk at them, we draw them out, we assign readings, we contrive problems, we assign papers. ("There is not enough talk," wrote one of my students in his evaluation, "about the destructiveness of assigning papers.") This problem of the initiative is not one of abuses or stupidities, but of the whole drift of the system. A student "takes" my course; he does "the" reading for it. I "give" a course; the students in it are "my" students—for its duration. In the classroom we face towards them and they face towards us. (Elsewhere they tend to face away from us.) Teachers who take a strong grip on their students tend to take them over from teachers in other courses whose grip is looser: so we each tend to tighten our grip, tighten our course. If a professor turns his back on this fact and invites the students in his course to work entirely in the open, without checkups or deadlines, his stand is apt to be regarded with abstract admiration, but his students, who are like junior executives trying to cope with several ringing telephones at once, tend to postpone the work in his course and may never do most of it.

The whole problem is exacerbated by our use of marks for each course, and each task in a course, to enforce standards. Although graduate and professional students take courses, the real enforcement of standards, for them, is by the general examinations which qualify them for their pro-

fession; because their commitment is professional, and long term, they can be relied on to work independently towards professional mastery. We have general examinations for undergraduates too, especially for honors candidates. But in practice it is the course examinations which keep the student going. He tends to think of himself as "earning" grades. In our extremely competitive, money-oriented society, we set aside—thank goodness—four years in which our ablest and most fortunate students devote themselves to disinterested, non-vocational study. But the ambient pattern of the culture reasserts itself: grades become a substitute for money. To be graded high is getting ahead; to accumulate satisfactory grades, even if undistinguished ones, is like putting money in the bank. The process is not only a symbolic action but a practical one, since good marks and degrees, at whatever level, are increasingly the prerequisites for satisfactory careers. There is certainly nothing simple to be done about grades: everybody agrees that like money they are the root of all evil, but, like money, they seem impossible to root out.

If what I have been describing is "The System"—and I have been conscious, as I spelled it out, that my description is a caricature—the fact is that good people everywhere, on both sides of the teacher's desk, are constantly working to beat the system or rise above it. Able teachers have always encouraged independence in their students and sought to avoid emphasis on grades—by the way they present the knowns and unknowns of their subjects, by the questions they ask or do *not* answer, by the reading they suggest, the problems they assign for papers: Agassiz leaving his students alone for weeks with trays of bones is a fine old example. Exceptional students almost everywhere are excused from much course work, supported in projects. And our undergraduates, on their side, show remarkable integrity and autonomy, again and again, in coping with their situation on the receiving end of the course and grade system. They often take especially difficult courses, or courses for which they have limited aptitude, just to follow their interests. Just because they are amateurs, they have a refreshingly genuine quality of interest—and boredom; and because of their inner independence, they are often more original than the more advanced, professionally-minded student.

But when this has been said, we must come back to the fact that the attitude produced in the average student by taking courses and getting marks tends to be passive. He does his jobs—the assigned jobs—almost like an industrial operative who leaves the planning and engineering of the whole process to somebody else—the faculty. The materials are provided, the tools put in his hands, and he does the job—fast. Again, this is a caricature; but with too much truth in it. One is particularly troubled about the many, many dutiful students who work chiefly for grades almost without knowing it, and define their problem in each course as doing what the teacher wants.

V. Summary and Conclusions

OUR PROJECT explored ways of mitigating the defect of a characteristic virtue of American undergraduate instruction: the tendency of strenuous teaching, within the regular system of classes and courses, to take too much of the initiative away from the student. The methods we tried out —"seminar" work for freshmen, independent student discussion groups for upperclassmen—are only two among many current approaches to the problem, and are not conceived as panaceas. Introduced in a scattering of individual courses, piecemeal, the innovations obviously could not be expected to work as they might as regular features of a curriculum. They did work well enough, under the circumstances, to justify the conclusion that they can be widely applied and developed.

Evaluation by participants. In eight of the fourteen courses offered, the innovations were judged to be clearly worthwhile by the instructor, a large majority of students, and the Committee for New College (those discussed above in Part II, Sections 1 and 3 and Part III, Sections 1, 2, 5, 7, and 9). One attempt was a clear-cut failure (Part II, Section 3). In the remaining five cases, where judgments about success were more or less qualified, there was nevertheless a strong student endorsement of the opportunities opened up, along with constructive suggestions as to how to use them more effectively. The fact that the courses were "experiments" was recognized as contributing to morale, by both students and instructors. But the fact that each was an isolated experience was also recognized as a difficulty. Students generally felt that they needed more time for the independent work than a five-course program permitted; those in Freshman Seminars felt that three such courses would make a full program. Freshmen felt no hesitation about their readiness for the kind of independent responsibilities given them; upperclassmen generally endorsed the introduction of more independent work early in college.

Instructors found that more of their time, rather than less, was required, in some cases much more time; their judgment was that less time would be required to supervise similar independent work in subsequent years, but that there would never be a substantial saving of faculty time. Another limiting factor is that the instructor must divert energy from direct preparation for teaching to secondary, unaccustomed and in some cases uncongenial problems of organizing the students' activities. Here we should mention the sobering fact that, when the project was being set up, relatively few volunteers came forward from the four faculties who were invited to

participate.[8] Our general impression is that faculty members find the results exciting once they involve themselves in setting up the sort of opportunities for student independence which we were concerned with; but that under present arrangements, where everything tends to center on one's classes and preparation for them (with a struggle to save some time for research), teachers are reluctant to take time out for executive work in directing their students' intellectual lives. So too with the students: although as the body of our report witnesses, they generally welcome opportunities for independent work, the pull of regular courses tends to make them slight the independent opportunities, unless these are very thoroughly worked into the structure of the course with which they are associated. This inertia—or better, momentum—reflects the *strength* of our customary arrangements. To overcome the weaknesses in student initiative that go with this strength obviously will require more far-reaching modifications of curriculum than those involved in our project. The favorable response of the faculty and students who actually tried the limited procedures reported on here indicates that much can be done if the changes we tested are supported by others.

Conclusions about organization. Our evidence makes abundantly clear that detailed arrangements and programs depend on what is being done intellectually, so that no general conclusions can be drawn about procedure by itself. The general conclusion which can be affirmed, categorically, is that students work well independently only when a clear-cut academic situation has been created for them. If, when they are left alone, they find themselves merely in a social situation, the occasion may amount to little more than ineffectual faculty interference with their social life. When they are provided with a universe of discourse and common awareness of problems, they show readiness to take off and move on their own.

In the Freshman Seminars, very considerable success was achieved by putting students "in the position of scholars," confronted by a limited range of material to be dealt with in some depth. To do this at the freshman level requires a great deal of faculty supervision: the more they are put on their own by the nature of the problem and the openness of assignments, the more aid and counsel they need. Results are best when the formulation of issues by the instructor is particularly clear-cut, for then the students find for themselves that they need the resources of the discipline to solve their problem. A teacher who has active research interests, on which he can draw, is most likely to succeed in introducing a subject in this way: he is most likely to have the courage to cut his students loose at intervals. Our experi-

[8]To compensate participants for the time involved in planning and reporting, an honorarium of four hundred dollars for each semester course was available, thanks to the supporting grant of the Fund for the Advancement of Education.

ence indicates that for such teachers to undertake seminar teaching of freshmen is well worth it, in view of the zest, sophistication and capacity for self-direction which can be developed in the students at the outset of their college opportunity.

The programming of discussion and the assignment of roles seems to be desirable in most cases, whether at the freshman or the upperclass level. The success of the scenario depends closely on how well it serves to articulate intellectual issues which have been made cogent for the participants. To have one student take charge of a whole meeting seems *not* to be advisable in most instances: it usually benefits him, but often at the expense of his colleagues. So too, the reading aloud of student papers makes for group boredom; on the other hand, good results are obtained by tying student presentations to papers they are writing or have written. The problem is always to encourage preparation, before the meeting, by as many of its members as possible. So in upperclass courses it is important to schedule independent discussion so that it continues or supplements the argument of lectures and class discussion, and flows back into later classes. To encourage preparation is also a motive for assigning parts in advance; individuals can be made responsible for presenting something, developing a line of argument, responding to another student's presentation, becoming the group's expert on a recurring aspect of their studies.

The best size for a group where parts are assigned depends on the number of available roles: five or six seems often to be right; groups of twelve worked well where active roles alternated from meeting to meeting between sets of six. In one case where assigned roles proved unnecessary, groups of ten were effective. For Freshman Seminars, fifteen was felt to be too many for the most fruitful discussion; this number proved a heavy load for the teacher. Two groups of ten freshmen, handled in parallel, and sometimes meeting together for lectures, worked well. In general, less than four seems not to be a group, while a group that is much larger than ten threatens to become a crowd. Where students met alone, a chairman was generally appointed or elected to act as moderator, not director; in some cases a chairman did not prove necessary. We did not explore the possibilities of using more advanced students as leaders. (The development of teaching-assistant roles for advanced students would of course be an entirely different kind of project from ours.)

Limitations and possibilities. In the detailed reports, given in Section II, of the Freshman Seminars, it is clear, at least in two of the three cases, that students felt they had "gained more" than they would have from more conventional introductory courses; and the instructors agreed with this judgment. Their progress towards becoming self-reliant, self-directed scholars involved some loss, however, in the range of material encountered.

This limitation was judged worthwhile. But each course was offered as one experience within a curriculum which as whole makes provision for wide coverage; so the trials did not confront the problem of balancing coverage against depth in a student's whole program.

It is probably fair to say that in the discussions conducted independently by students in upperclass courses, few statements were arrived at or arguments developed which were superior in intellectual quality to what is achieved under the active direction of a teacher, while much of the discussion was undoubtedly less to the point, less sophisticated, less respectable professionally, than the discussion in a well-run class. One must face this fact to evaluate independent discussion realistically—and one's final judgment will depend on what one thinks is important.

Several of the teachers taking part, notably Professor Rothman and Professor DeMott, in confronting the relatively unsophisticated level at which their students operated when on their own, concluded that it is definitely a good thing to give them occasions to function in this way. This point was talked about at some length when the participating teachers and the Committee for New College met to compare experiences towards the end of the second term. Professor DeMott spoke of listening in silence at one of his seminars with "a feeling of quite intense despair." I referred to similar experiences of my own in visiting my "reading groups," and also to the satisfaction of learning that students had found their way, through meandering discussion, to an understanding of poetry grounded in their *own* experience. Professor DeMott spoke of a disturbing realization that "in classroom teaching less gets across by my tone than I had thought. Not that you should give up the habit of speaking freely, from your own vantage. But I had a revelation of some self-deception in teaching. I realized that I had sometimes sophisticated myself out of what for the students was the heart of the matter. They opened it up. For me it was a marvelous experience; it took the top of teacher's head off."

There was general agreement among the participants that Professor Rothman and Professor DeMott had brought out something quite fundamental—important for evaluating not only independent student work but also the discussions we lead in class and the lectures we give. Professor Mair emphasized this value for our *other* teaching of using the student seminar, and Professor Von Klemperer, writing her final conclusions about independent student sessions, remarked that "they can be a good thing for the instructor too, as Professor Mair pointed out at our last meeting: it's wholesome for us to realize that our students' minds don't mirror our ideas and that we shouldn't overestimate the rapidity and clarity of their thinking (or for that matter underestimate its value)." Professor Schuck (who

was not present at our spring meeting because her course had taken place during the first rather than the second term) might have referred to the "feeling of quite intense despair" which many of her students experienced when confronting what seemed at first a welter of hopelessly unmanageable data, only to emerge later with a stronger feeling of mastery. As long as a teacher is always in charge, whether in leading discussion, or working everything out in a lecture, or providing the directions for reading and writing projects, the student can avoid falling back into where he actually *is*—and the teacher can avoiding watching him fall. One can refer here to the use of the long pause by those who employ interviews for research or therapy. The interviewer or the analyst has to resist the temptation to leap into the void of a silence and help the other along. There are classroom teachers who have the courage to remain silent in this way—but not many. Of course, as Professor DeMott emphasized, we do not want to *leave* students where they are—we want to lead them out of there, educate them. But, as Professor Masi noted in her report about her freshman philosophers, finding where they are is an important part of the process, for them and for their teachers.

The experience of working on the project brought many of us a new realization of the too-exclusive value which is put on finished verbal formulations by classroom discussion and lecturing. The summary statements which bring an argument to closure are often furnished by only a few members of the class, more often still by the teacher himself. One should not overestimate their cogency for those who, though present, have not themselves *arrived* at the conclusion. They have a *need* for following false scents, going around Robin Hood's barn, saying the obvious, or saying what is almost too personal. The value of such opportunities seems to be reflected in the firmer grasp on the subject which many students in our project gained, apparently as a result of rather loose discussion. This result appears in the exceptionally fine papers produced in several of the courses.

Our conclusion is not, of course, that independent discussion should replace class discussion, nor that we should relax our efforts to bring student thinking up to scholarly levels. But independent student discussion seems to us a fruitful alternative to directed discussion, not just a second best. When a teacher is present, students speak to him or for him: when they are in the presence only of their peers, different relations to the subject and to each other's understanding of it have a chance to develop. Partly as a consequence of the habits ingrained by the attending of classes, this reorientation many sometimes be achieved only with difficulty and uneasily. But where a genuine community of interest does form, and conversation flows freely, students are in a situation which, for many of them, is too rare in college

experience: they are free of the influence of a teacher, yet in the presence of a subject. Here their strong concern for their relations with their own age group is brought into the service of their education. Collaboration, of course, takes place spontaneously, in any case, among many students; and one cannot expect that the formal organization of student discussion will penetrate very deeply with all of them—by itself it obviously cannot change folkways. But most students in our project found it valuable; some found it an important liberation.

Our final conclusion is that, in setting out to encourage student initiative, as in all other areas, one learns by doing. There are more ways to do it than appear by merely taking thought. We all felt, after one experience, that we would do it somewhat differently, and somewhat better, another time. What is discouraging is that, in the normal course of faculty work, there is little occasion for people to set their minds to the problems and possibilities. What is encouraging is that much can be done.[9]

[9]While this report was in press, a most interesting "Proposal for a New College of Liberal Arts," by Professor Neill Megaw of Williams College, appeared in the *AAUP Bulletin* for December, 1961 (Vol. 47, No. 4, pp. 330-338). His plan, very different in many respects from our 1958 *New College Plan*, has some of the same basic goals. It includes provision for independent student work in writing and reading organized in a fashion different from anything we have envisaged or tried.

A writing program is to be carried on through all four years by the students themselves, after a first-term introduction by the English staff. "Lowerclassmen write under the supervision of upperclassmen of exceptional ability, helping each other through group correction and discussion procedures; upperclassmen, according to ability, continue writing weekly essays, or teach and correct lowerclass composition in teams of three or four, or join the senior committee which sets the weekly topics and administers the system"—with occasional checkings or overhauls by the English staff.

The reading program involves each student's choosing books from lists appropriate for each year of college and his main interests, with year-end examinations, and time to complete preparation for them during a seven week spring term when he takes only one regular course. Here too there is provision for student responsibility: reading lists are to be revised annually by students (with faculty advice), and students will also "compose examinations and organize their correction." And there is provision for student discussion and group study of the reading as part of the change of pace of the spring term.

Professor Megaw emphasizes that in the present American college program "our students are not active enough in the educational process," that "we must learn to trust the students with a larger share of responsibility, and to do this we must deemphasize formal courses under continuous faculty supervision." "The reading and writing programs . . . are intended as giant steps in this direction, running as they do through all four years of college."

Appendix A: Excerpts from The New College Plan, Amherst, Mass., 1958

FROM THE FOREWORD:

THE ATTACHED report recommends the establishment of a new college in our area, to be sponsored by our four institutions—a coeducational, residential college, initially of about a thousand students, at which major new departures in liberal education can be initiated.

We were asked to re-think the assumptions underlying education in the liberal arts and to re-evaluate accepted practices and techniques, in order to draw up plans for a college which would provide "education of the highest quality at a minimum cost per student and with as small a faculty relative to the student body as new methods of instruction and new administrative procedures can make possible." . . .

It is a widely-held conviction among liberal arts faculties that our system of courses and credits has got out of hand, and that our students are capable of far more independence than they exercise in present college programs. We propose a college which frees both students and faculty from the system which makes education a matter of giving and taking courses to cover subjects.

At New College, subjects will be covered, not by providing complete programs of courses, but by training the student to master recognized fields of knowledge. A systematic and sustained effort will be made to train students to educate themselves. As freshmen, they will start with seminars especially designed as the first step, not the last, in independence. Other devices, such as student-led seminars associated with all lecture courses, will follow to reinforce this initial experience. Throughout, the program will provide for a type of social interaction which will create a climate favorable to intellectual activities. . . .

The changes proposed will lead to significant economies in dollars and, more important, in the number of teachers required. . . . But the proposal has not been arrived at by cutting up the curriculum to fit economic considerations; on the contrary, educational motives have been paramount throughout our planning. . . .

FROM (1) THE NEW COLLEGE PROPOSAL:

An Introductory and Summary View

1. A NEW ROLE FOR THE COURSE

Unless a student "takes" a course, that subject remains closed to him—this is the assumption fostered by the course system in American higher education. The difficulties of operating colleges on this assumption have

become increasingly acute with the constant expansion of knowledge. That everything should be taught was the high ideal of Eliot and the other leaders who, in creating our great universities, gave up the required curriculum in classical and religious subjects in favor of an open, unlimited course offering. Inclusiveness remains a vitally important ideal for universities. But for undergraduate colleges it is extremely wasteful of teaching resources. The typical college strives to be a university in miniature, with the fullest possible complement of departments and of courses within each department. Such course offerings, wasteful now, will become impossible for most colleges in the approaching period of large enrollments and relatively few teachers.

One solution would be a return to some new version of the old system of required courses for all, so as to eliminate courses elected by only handfuls of students. But the difficulty is that we cannot, and should not, settle what should be required for all. Vital education requires an open market: if for the sake of economical operation we give a monopoly to any one program, however imaginatively conceived, we lose some of the liberty in liberal education.

The New College plan offers a very different solution. It preserves the vital freedom of choice among courses and teachers and includes a requirement of distribution and concentration. But it dethrones the course as *the* unit of knowledge, and by doing so, drastically reduces the number of courses that need be offered. It will be able to do this because it will devote a great deal of faculty time to teaching the student to teach himself. The plan also dethrones the idea that a college must be an intellectual autarchy: the course offering is to be developed so as to take advantage for collateral purposes of resources available at neighboring institutions. Thus the College will be designed to demonstrate what can be gained by taking advantage of opportunities for cooperation which exist wherever institutions are located near together.

Instead of organizing the curriculum by departments, each of which attempts to provide a course offering which it regards as adequate to cover its subject, New College will aim to fit its students to master subjects, chiefly on their own initiative, by providing them with the necessary skills, resources, and intellectual stimulation. Each member of the faculty will give just one lecture course at any one time; students will have a three-course program. The time saved from course work by faculty and students will be used for seminars and independent projects, so that the College, even with a faculty-student ratio of one to twenty, can emphasize educational situations where it is the student rather than the teacher who is performing.

2. TRAINING IN INDEPENDENCE

It has long been the goal of liberal arts colleges to prepare students for a lifetime of self-education. The means of education, however, frequently come to obstruct its goals. What we want to create is independent initiative and intellectual enterprise. Yet too often, faculty complaints about "spoon feeding" go with a course program which minutely prescribes what the students shall do and gives them so much to do that they have little time left for independent work.

At New College, students will begin their work with seminars: a large proportion of faculty time will be invested in showing groups of ten to fifteen freshmen what it is to work as a scholar by directing them in the exploration of a limited subject matter. All upperclass lecture courses—where enrollments will be larger, averaging about 42—will be accompanied by collateral seminar work, directed by the lecturer, but for the most part conducted by the students themselves.

The New College plan is based on the conviction that the average student entering one of the better colleges is capable of far more independence than he now demonstrates, but that he must be given proper training and proper opportunities. It will be a major goal of the College to develop and sustain a style of life which will make it habitual for students to work together in groups, and individually, without constant recourse to the faculty. In the last two years, the use the student makes of lecture courses, advanced seminars, and his independent work will be given direction by a program of concentration which will include rigorous examinations on recognized fields of knowledge, one in his junior year and two (or one and a thesis) in his senior year.

3. COMMON INTELLECTUAL EXPERIENCE

The variety of courses and programs in the regular curriculum will be complemented by the common experience all students will share in taking two college-wide courses during a month-long midwinter term, to be held each year after the Christmas vacation, between the fall and spring terms. This will be an occasion for projects integrating different disciplines. In working out the two midwinter courses, members of the college faculty and guest scholars will seek to use their varied knowledge to illuminate subjects or problems of general importance. One course will deal with some aspect of the Western cultural heritage; the other with one or another of the great non-Western cultures. The subjects will change each year over a four-year cycle, so that all graduates will have studied four significant aspects of their own culture and a central feature of four other great cultures.

It is possible that a summer session can be developed at which the

midwinter courses will be repeated, so the plan can be put to year-round use and other groups can be reached besides the regular undergraduate body.

4. TEACHING DISCIPLINES WITHOUT DEPARTMENTS

It is the pressure generated by departmental organization, in combination with the course system, which is chiefly responsible for the proliferation of courses. The department as a whole seeks to produce thoroughly trained majors by offering many courses; individual teachers add courses to make a place for themselves and their interests in the department. The New College plan eliminates departments while preserving the three customary academic divisions. But at the same time it recognizes that the intellectual life of a college must be structured to a large extent by the specialized disciplines. The training of faculty members should be exploited rather than ignored. Individually, most of them approach learning from the viewpoint of a single discipline. It is the tool which they know best and can most effectively share. Further, students who are just beginning to learn the difference between facts and the analysis of facts can progress more rapidly if several approaches to understanding are not presented simultaneously in the same course. This is not to deny that the various disciplines have much in common; but what is common should emerge as the liberal arts student moves forward in his education.

The curriculum provides that freshmen be initiated into scholarship by encountering the disciplines employed by two particular teachers, one in the humanities and one in the social sciences. The instructors will work with students in areas with which they are concerned as specialists. Except in the case of the physical sciences, where a cooperative course has special advantages, the curriculum avoids the arrangement by which departments, or groups of departments, develop special introductory courses for their whole subject or area, whether of the survey or the problem type. Even in a college where there will be no official departmental units, such courses would probably promote the equivalent of departmental empire building. This does not mean that two or more individual instructors of freshman seminars will not, whenever they choose, combine their student groups at intervals for special purposes. But we want to avoid a programmatic curriculum which involves teachers in courses not of their own department or choosing, where they do not always work at their best.

The same goal of avoiding departmental structure, while recognizing that most work must be by disciplines, appears in the upperclass offering. Each of the fifty members of the faculty will be free to decide what he will teach, in consultation with his colleagues and in response to his own interests and those of the students. The total offering of upperclass lecture courses will be far below accepted norms: only fifty courses in one semester,

one hundred (plus the two midwinter courses) in a year. But the limited number will be compensated for by several factors. The most important factor by all odds is the active role given the students. A three-course program, instead of five- or four-, will make it possible for each course to be substantial. Subjects will wherever possible be taught only in alternate years, so that a total of perhaps one hundred and fifty subjects will be available to students over and above the subjects dealt with in the freshman program and in advanced seminars.

The range of subjects offered should be wide; and the practice of assigning only one lecture course to a man should go far toward eliminating the courses of limited interest to teacher and students which normally encrust the curriculum. The course offering will be free to develop dynamically in response to changing intellectual interests. If free development can be assured, we believe there will be little or no need for programmatic, *a priori* integration. A wise president and responsible faculty leaders, building and rebuilding a faculty so as to represent roughly the balance of interests current in the several disciplines and choosing men first for their minds rather than their subjects, can create an intellectual community where the rigorous practice of the principal disciplines will be complemented by the pursuit of understanding of the problems which emerge as common concerns. The tendency to unify is as fundamental in the life of the mind as the tendency to specialize. The midwinter term, moreover, will promote intercommunication by furnishing an annual occasion set apart for projects in integration. In short, the New College course offering will not be "complete," but it will be thoroughly alive.

5. COOPERATION WITH THE SPONSORING INSTITUTIONS

It will be a great advantage that New College can use some of the teaching resources of the four sponsoring institutions. When a subject which is missing from the New College course offering engages a student's serious interest, and cannot well be studied as an independent project, it will usually be available to him at one of the cooperating colleges. Students will be required to take at least one semester course away during their college career. The College can pay the costs to its neighbors of this enrichment of its program without incurring anything like the expense required to maintain separately the teachers and facilities involved. And it can afford to pay its full share of a cooperative transportation system. It will be unnecessary to support disciplines which are included when a college is conceived as a single, isolated entity.

New College must have autonomy, but it will be designed to operate as part of a larger intellectual community. Where a discipline is not rep-

resented on its faculty at all — as may be the case with astronomy, for example, or geology, or Italian, or the history of music—it will not be possible for students at the College to concentrate in the field, but they will be able to study it away as a supplement to their main interests. In certain other disciplines—for example, the ancient and some modern languages and some of the sciences—it will be possible for a student to organize a program of concentration by combining work under one or two members of the New College faculty with a number of courses taken elsewhere, since many advanced courses in such fields are not heavily elected at the sponsoring colleges. Because New College will be starting fresh, with a curriculum that provides for just one lecture course at a time for each teacher, its faculty will not feel the reluctance about courses being offered elsewhere which tends to limit the efforts of established institutions to supplement each other.

The College will also be hospitable to the resources increasingly available in educational films, television, and language laboratory facilities. . . .

6. PROGRAMS OF CONCENTRATION

"Completeness" will not depend on the course offering, but on the student, since he is made responsible, as he matures, for organizing his study so as to master subjects covered by the field examinations. His teachers will have time to help him in this enterprise, since their energies will not be largely tied up in giving a number of courses. The field examinations will not be departmental "comprehensives," but will cover limited subjects, of a scope larger, however, than any one course deals with. Programs of concentration will be developed by the student frequently on an *ad hoc* basis; he will be free to make any combination of courses, individual projects and field examinations which he can justify to a faculty committee drawn from the three divisions. So there will be no temptation for faculty to say "We must have such and such a course to prepare our majors for their comprehensives," nor will students be encouraged to relax into following a program of courses, from one test to the next, in preparation for a general examination which is made up of questions about each course. The field examinations will periodically be set by outside examiners, so as to assure the maintenance of standards recognized by the professional group concerned. . . .

FROM (II) THE CURRICULUM AND ITS RATIONALE:

1. THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM

The skeleton of the four-year program can be stated briefly. During fall and spring terms of fourteen weeks each, students take three courses; all students take the two college-wide courses during the month of the mid-

winter term, which comes immediately after Christmas vacation. The entering freshmen are introduced to the methods of the three divisions by two fall-term "Freshman Seminars" on limited subjects in the humanities and the social sciences, and by a required science course in mathematics, physics, and chemistry, designed to put the student in the position of working as a scientist. In the midwinter term, the freshmen join upperclassmen in the two courses all students take together. In the second semester, the freshman science course continues, but the work in the other two divisions is in courses which combine lectures with seminars and train the student groups to work more and more independently. Where the Freshman Seminars will average 12 students, these spring Freshman Lecture-Student Seminars will average 24. The upperclass Lecture-Student Seminar courses which make up the staple of the curriculum after freshman year, combining presentations by the professor with group discussions and projects where the students take the initiative, will average about 42 students.

The distribution requirement provides that every student take four semesters in two different humanities, four in two different social sciences, and three in science. After the freshman year, where the work is equally divided among the three divisions, the requirement in science can be met, either by a semester course dealing with the impact of science on society, or by an introductory course in biology or psychology, or by work in either physics, chemistry, or mathematics which carries on beyond the freshman course. The courses required for distribution in the other two divisions are to be completed at the latest by the end of junior year. The eight courses taken in the midwinter term over a student's four years—four studies in Western culture and four in four other cultures—provide a common "core" program equivalent, on a calendar basis, to somewhat more than a term's work.

Programs of concentration occupy at least half and not more than two-thirds of the regular term-time course work in the last two years an include one field examination during junior year, two field examinations or one examination and a thesis during senior year. All students will take part in one faculty-supervised Advanced Seminar (averaging 10) during the spring of junior year or during senior year; some students may participate in more than one such seminar. . . .

2. ESTABLISHING AND SUSTAINING THE PATTERN OF STUDENT INITIATIVE

The independence which all good teachers want in their students cannot be created by an act of will on the part of the faculty. Too often, faculty members themselves discourage initiative by elaborating packaged

tasks in an effort to be sure that the student learns all they think he should. This is particularly apt to be true in freshman programs. Where survey courses are the rule, concern for "coverage" can lead to presenting students with huge blocks of departmental subject matter, especially where several departments are each trying to do justice to their subjects within the confines of a single course. Where inter-departmental courses center on selected problems, some of the difficulties of the survey method are avoided; but at the freshman level a rare combination of skill and fortune in cooperation is necessary to avoid vaudeville shows where students see the tricks of each trade but do not really learn how they are done.

The New College curriculum is designed to establish a pattern of independent behavior by intensive training in it at the outset and to reinforce the habit of initiative thereafter by continuing to provide situations which call for it. Hence the very large investment of faculty time in the freshman seminars of the first term and the combination, thereafter, of student seminars with lecture courses: once established, a way of doing things can be kept going with diminishing reinforcement. So the curriculum gives up the customary pyramid which provides a broad base of factual knowledge in survey courses during the early years and an apex of specialized study in the later departmental seminar and thesis, where the student learns the tools of a scholarly discipline. Breadth of knowledge is certainly essential; but really to know goes with knowing how to know. Broad knowledge will not be pre-digested for New College students; it will come as a natural consequence of exploration, of "getting around" in their subjects.

3. THE FIRST-TERM FRESHMAN SEMINARS IN HUMANITIES AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Methods are best introduced, not in the abstract, but in action. The fall freshman seminars will teach methodology by exploring limited subjects, each teacher deciding on a subject and its limits with a view to best showing a group of about twelve students how he works, and how they can work, in using his discipline. There need be no effort to be novel, either in the disciplines presented or the topics used, except as novelty happens because of the way the main line of a man's intellectual development is going. (To call for novel *content* in a whole curriculum is to invite the superficial and the faddist.) Nor need there by any effort to show all the students, in all the seminars, some "common principles of scholarship." Most methodologies and intellectual processes are encountered many times in a liberal arts education. In the course of educational experiences there is more probability of developing good intellectual practices if some attention is paid to method as well as to content. But the experience must be specific

and clear, rather than broad and diffuse—so the subjects treated in the freshman seminars will be limited in scope. It will be valuable for the teachers of the various different seminars to cooperate, as they see opportunities, in arranging that their students hear lectures together on subjects of common interest, or encounter approaches whose differences and likenesses will illuminate the methods each group is learning to use.

Seminars in History would neither be in "Western Europe from the Fall or Rome to the Atomb Bomb," nor yet in "Historiography," but in subjects like "The Civil War," "The Age of Absolutism, 1648-1789," or "The Age of Pericles." Similarly, neither "Beowulf to Thomas Wolfe," nor "Principles of Criticism and Methods of Literary History" would be offered; instead, literary history and criticism would be presented as activities by working intensively with limited materials. The curriculum proposed at New College will make the students' first college experience sharply different from what most of them will have had in school—as is too often not the case with present freshman programs. They will encounter a scholar working with materials which are alive for him with excitement, perplexities, alternatives, problems, unexplored possibilities. Instructors will have the advantage of working in areas they have chosen because of strong interests (new teachers may frequently choose the exoteric sides of subjects they have explored in working for their doctorates). Students will quickly be assigned work to be performed independently, the instructor designing projects for which the freshman will have or can acquire the necessary frame of reference, and in which he will encounter, as he works, fundamental problems of the topic and the discipline. A problem which all will encounter will be "How to Write." Teachers will have to spend a great deal of time teaching composition, as it relates to their field, by working through student papers, sometimes with the writer alone and sometimes with the group. (Remedial work in composition may be necessary, but it is hoped that in such cases the need will be recognized before the student enrolls and he can be required to take remedial work in the summer before he enters the College.) Oral reports to the group of the findings in a paper can provide occasions for teaching students how to defend positions taken, enlarge or redefine problems, contribute comments and questions on the work of others, express "assent and dissent in graduated terms." The art of behavior in a scholarly group will be taught along with the art of the conduct of the mind. Each student will have two Freshman Seminars, so that during his first fall at the College he will be able to compare an experience of a discipline in the humanities with an experience in the area of the social sciences. . . .

4. THE FRESHMAN'S TRANSITION TO GREATER INDEPENDENCE

The freshmen's first experience in the midwinter term should help to consolidate the attitudes inculcated by the fall term. For they will be taking part in discussion groups along with upperclassmen, who are more experienced than they are as students, but who are also encountering subjects new to them. Some of the discussions will be led by advanced students fitted by their concentration to do so; others may be led by faculty who are almost as unfamiliar with the topic as the students. The lectures, meanwhile, will frequently be the presentation of fresh, novel, or controversial conclusions, by authorities who are working at the growing edge of the subject. "The life of the mind" should not be an abstraction after participation in college-wide courses conducted in this way.

The second semester of freshman year can be a guided transition to more independent work. Sections in the science course can be larger; more of the experiments can be open-ended, confronting the student with equipment related to the concepts being discussed and asking him to devise something meaningful to do with it. The two "Freshman Lecture-Student Seminars," one in humanities and one in a social science, would meet in groups of 24 for lectures and divide into two or more parts for seminar purposes, the smaller groups doing things suggested by the lectures under a tutelage explicitly aimed at developing their independence and competence. These spring term courses will deal with larger subject-matters than was possible in the autumn, often serving to provide both information and techniques which are generally useful for pursuing a discipline at an advanced level. The instructor will sometimes lead the seminar sessions, sometimes listen silently, sometimes be notable by his absence. He will make it his business to give advice and point out object lessons in what can be done successfully in group work and what modes of operation lead to failure, the necessity of preparation and participation, the importance of courteous listening, how to ask questions without arousing antagonism, how to offer each other encouragement and criticize inadequate work without creating antagonisms or destructive discouragement.

Many good students will have to be weaned gradually but firmly from the habit of shaping all their remarks for the benefit of the teacher; other students, who have resisted this tendency, will find an unfamiliar pleasure in expressing to their peers this own unforced responses to what they are studying. The fact that the student seminars will be composed of men and women working together should be very helpful: though one can generalize too far, experience suggests that, provided a style of life has been established which respects the process of sharing intellectual experience, the two sexes bring out the best in each other intellectually.

6. THE UPPERCLASS

LECTURE-STUDENT SEMINAR COURSE

In providing for independently conducted student seminars and projects as an adjunct of all upperclass courses, the committee is relying on the establishment of a style of life at New College which will make such work something that everyone does and expects to do. It is also recognized that the independent work collateral to each lecture course will not happen automatically; to direct it will take a good deal of the lecturer's time and more still of his thought. Where a teacher's lecture-seminar is substantially larger than average—above, say, 60—he will be expected to teach only one freshman or seminar group instead of two. The lecturer is thus given time for working out collateral projects, visiting at intervals the student groups who undertake them, checking through papers and reading at least a good part of them, advising students in his course who chose him as their adviser about the design of their programs of concentration and their preparation for field examinations. He will, in addition, have the help of at least one paid student assistant, who on his side will be learning, in an apprentice relationship, what is involved in teaching.

Many curricula have provided for this kind of supervision by tutorial sessions apart from the course program, either on an individual or group basis. But to tie the direction of independent work to the lecture course should save faculty time and increase student initiative. The students and the lecturer will have a common frame of reference, instead of having to spend a wasteful amount of time establishing communication. There will be no fixed hour or half-hour conference period to be filled up whether or not the discussion runs out of gas. Individual students will not be saddled with one teacher as adviser or tutor, whether congenial or not, since they will normally be encountering three instructors in their three courses. Students will also be able to follow a line of their own through the collateral work of several different courses: they will not be merely "taking" courses.

The use throughout the course program of student seminars attached to courses is certainly a new departure, one which will require a great deal of experimentation and which may develop in a number of directions. But it should be noted that independent study groups and clubs, fundamentally similar to what we are proposing, are increasingly a feature of American student life at all levels, from elementary school through graduate school. And there is a variety of programs of adult education which are developing through the group discussion method. Such groups share intellectual interests, sometimes with a teacher or trained leader, sometimes without. This type of self-education should certainly gain in coherence and intensity in an institution where its ways are taught from the outset and then continuously reinforced.

The lectures in upperclass courses should gain rather than lose from the circumstances that classes will usually be fairly large, sometimes very large, that lectures will be given less frequently, often only once or twice a week, that both the students and the lecturer will have freely chosen to concern themselves with the subject. Because there will be other places for discussion, it can be hoped that the lecture will often be a thoroughly prepared, concentrated presentation. The combination of lecture with discussion, though it can be very valuable, can also be neither fish, flesh, nor good red herring—too many teachers come to rely on random student questions to carry things along in the absence of meditated organization. The style of life at New College should encourage widespread auditing. Giving relatively few lectures, teachers will often be on their mettle to make a decisive impact.

Appendix B

A SAMPLE of the bibliographies furnished by Professor Rothman in connection with the topics dealt with by his student discussion groups.

The following was given out in connection with the question: "Is Soviet society more or less egalitarian than ours? Can one speak of the emergence of a new class in Soviet Society?"

Wednesday, March 16. The question can be broken down into many parts. Remember equality has something to do with both differences in income at any given point as well as the possibilities of mobility either within a generation or intergenerationally. And the question is not only directed at economic equality in the narrow sense. It brings in such problems as the distribution of power within the society. For example are inequalities of power between Soviet managers and workers greater or less than those between American managers and workers and so forth?

For a general discussion of mobility and social class and power equalities or inequalities see the essays by Marshall and Sirokin in R. Bendix and S. M. Lipset, *Class, Status, Power.* The essay by Bendix in the same volume contains interesting observations on the relationship between social class and political power. Finally, the volume contains a number of interesting essays on aspects of the problem in the United States and the Soviet Union. Additional material on the United States which talks about social and power *inequalities* will be found in Vance Packard, *The Status Seekers* and C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite.* essays by Riesman and Bell in the Bendix, Lipset volume provide an indirect answer to Packard and Mills as does the Lipset-Bendix book, *Social Mobility in Industrial Society.* A direct answer to Mills is D. Bell, "The Power Elite—Reconsidered," *American Journal of Sociology* XLIV (Nov., 1958) pp. 238-250.

For materials with an emphasis on Soviet conditions see the relevant chapters in R. A. Bauer and Alex Inkeles, *The Soviet Citizen.* Additional material will be found in David Granick, *The Red Executive,* and in the following articles: Robert A. Feldmesser, "The Persistence of Status Advantages in Soviet Russia," *American Journal of Sociology,* July, 1953, pp. 19-26, and Feldmesser, "Social Status and Access to Higher Education: A Comparison of the United States and the Soviet Union," *Harvard Educational Review,* Spring 1957. pp. 92-106.

Varying perspectives on the place of labor in the U.S., the Soviet Union and other countries will be found in P. Jacobs and J. M. Harrington (eds.) *Labor in a Free Society,* H. M. Schwartz, *Russia's Soviet Economy,* and Jacob Miller, *Soviet Russia.* All of these are somewhat out of date. For some later material see the articles in *Soviet Studies* by Schlesinger, Miller and Dewar (July, 1957, July, 1958, July, 1956 and October, 1957, respectively). Be careful of the last five items cited, however, they tend to look at the Soviet scene, in some cases, through rose colored spectacles.

Appendix C

NOTES ON procedure, and a summary of the program for discussion used by Professor DeMott in his course on Seventeenth Century Literature:

Some Notes on Procedure:

The function of the Chairmen of each seminar is to remind those delivering oral reports of their time limit, and to call on the discussants named above for commentary on the reports before the subjects are open to general discussion. The Chairmen should seek an authoritative but cheerful tone and should remember that they will be replaced at the next meeting of the seminar.

The function of those named as commentators on the reports is to amplify or dissent or question, and only secondarily to judge. They should arrive at a position of a kind toward the subject of the report *before* coming to the seminar, but they need not feel obliged to attack the speaker for failing to express it.

The function of those delivering reports is to make one cogent critical point forcefully and entertainingly. The reports should be delivered from typed notes (these are to be handed in to the instructor at the close of the seminar), but not read. There are three reports in each hour; if the limit of five minutes is observed with reasonable care, ten minutes at least should be available for discussion of each report.

The seminars are in effect divided into two sections of six or seven members—which is to say that students who are delivering reports on March 3 will be commenting on reports at the next seminar. No unexcused absences from the seminars are permitted. A reporter or commentator who cannot think of a way to approach the subject assigned him should feel free to consult the instructor, but the latter does of course (as should be said) value originality above imitation.

Organization of a Two-Hour Seminar on Milton's Areopagitica and Eliot's Notes Towards the Definition of Culture

1. The class was divided into three seminars, and each seminar into two groups containing six or seven students. The students were assigned to these by the instructor, but other ways of distribution are possible.

2. In each seminar two chairmen were appointed—one for the first hour and one for the second.

3. The programs for the three seminars were alike as follows:

a. Topics for the first hour, each presented by a specified person and discussed by two or three others assigned to the task:
The Tone of the Areopagitica
The Tone of Eliot's Notes
The Idea of Religion in the Areopagitica

b. Topics for the second hour, presented and discussed by appointed individuals, as follows:
The Idea of Religion in Eliot's Notes
Eliot's Sense of the Future
Milton's Sense of the Future

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